



940.9388 Y72c 58-07979  
Young, George Gordon \$3.50  
The Cat with two faces.  
Coward-McCann [1957]

940.9388 Y72c 58-07979  
Young, George Gordon \$3.50  
The Cat with two faces.  
Coward-McCann [1957]  
223p. illus.



Books will be issued only  
on presentation of library card.  
Please report lost cards and  
change of residence promptly.  
Card holders are responsible for  
all books, records, films, pictures  
or other library materials  
checked out on their cards.

KANSAS CITY MO PUBLIC LIBRARY



0 0001 0339965 5



## THE CAT WITH TWO FACES



GORDON YOUNG

The Cat

With Two Faces

COWARD-McCANN, INC.  
NEW YORK

© 1957 by Gordon Young

*FIRST AMERICAN EDITION*

All rights reserved. This book or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the Publisher

Library of Congress Catalog  
Card Number: 58-5899

To LEONARD CURTIS  
*in memoriam*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# Contents

<i>Author's Foreword</i>	9
1 The Little Princess	15
2 Days of Despair	21
3 Weaving the Web	29
4 Inter-Allied Calling London	38
5 Disaster	53
6 The Cat's New Face	66
7 The Great Betrayal	74
8 "Lovely Day"	83
9 The Cattery	94
10 The <i>Scharnhorst</i> and the <i>Gneisenau</i>	105
11 The Man from the Sky	111
12 Shadow of Doubt	122
13 Plot and Counter-Plot	134
14 The Embarkation	142
15 London in the Spring	155
16 "Memoirs of a Cat"	169
17 "What Else Could I Do?"	174
18 The Price of Treason	189
19 Cat without Claws	201
20 Riddle with Many Answers	208
<i>Epilogue</i>	216



## Illustrations

“The Cattery”, St. Germain — a very ordinary house. It had a secret radio transmitter in the attic	96
Hugo Bleicher on a post-war visit to Paris, sitting outside the Cafe Pam Pam — scene of the Cat’s first denunciation	97
The Cat in court	128
Renée Borni in court on a stretcher	129



## Author's Foreword

ODDLY enough, it was almost by accident that I first heard about the strange affair of The Cat, one of the most remarkable stories, surely, to have come out of the Second World War.

I had been talking one evening in a Paris bar with an old friend and veteran newspaper correspondent, Henry Wales of the *Chicago Tribune*. Wales, who is an inveterate champion of unpopular causes, was on that particular occasion waxing indignant about a case which was currently causing him great concern. It was what he considered to be a miscarriage of justice inflicted on a Breton fisherman named Geoffroy who had been sentenced to death by a French court. The man had been found guilty of betraying to the Germans on a dark night of February 1942 two British agents who had just landed secretly on the coast of Brittany and who had gone into hiding in his barn. The Breton (who years later was set free) had consistently maintained that it was not he who had betrayed the two Englishmen but that the Germans had themselves all along been perfectly aware that the two agents had landed on the night in question. This was the point which Henry Wales, hater of anything which looked to him like an injustice, was campaigning to bring to the notice of the French authorities. "Anybody but a fool could see it plainly," grumbled Wales to me that evening. "Of course the Germans knew that the two British agents had landed, because they came across in the very same motor gunboat of the Royal Navy which had been sent from Britain to take on board The Cat. And of course you know it was the Germans themselves who, in the

middle of the war, helped to send that woman spy Mathilde Carré—The Cat as she was called—to London."

Indeed I knew nothing of the kind. At that moment I had never even heard of The Cat, much less of any story that the Germans had helped to send to Britain at the height of the war a woman spy whom they intended to have act as a secret agent on their behalf. From that moment my interest in the accused Breton was increasingly overshadowed by my desire and determination to find out all I could about this woman, whose role in the Second World War was obviously a much stranger one than that of Mata Hari in the first.

I looked up all the available newspaper cuttings—French and British—on the affair of Madame Carré, but did not find a great deal there of help. My own newspaper—the *Daily Mail*—had briefly reported her trial in 1949 and so had a few of the Paris papers. But it was a period when the public had become sated with stories of the Resistance, and little of the evidence given was available in print.

I went to seek the aid of Maitre Albert Naud, the distinguished Paris barrister who had brilliantly championed The Cat in the face of her accusers. And on the many visits which I paid him, Maitre Naud gave me much valuable advice and information.

I went to the home of Mathilde Carré's parents, and at last had one memorable talk with Mathilde Carré herself, an interview which vastly stimulated my desire to learn more of the true facts of her case.

The official records of the trial of The Cat provided the names and addresses of many of those who had given evidence during the three-day hearing. One after another I called on those whom it was still possible to locate, and heard what they had to say. On this quest I visited smart apartments in the west-end residential areas of Paris, busy offices around the Champs Elysées, quiet little back rooms in Montmartre, dark hovels in dingy courtyards—in all

of which places I found people whose lives had been profoundly shaken—and usually marked with tragedy—as a result of their association with The Cat. Some of those I saw talked freely, some hesitatingly and only on condition that I did not mention them in this narrative by name. And others refused to talk at all, maintaining stolidly that the story of The Cat was such a painful wartime episode that they themselves sought only to forget it. I talked to as many as I could find of the French and British Resistance men who had at one time or another come into contact with Madame Carré. I read the German versions of the story of The Cat made public after the war by the two Nazi *Abwehr* officials principally concerned, Captain Erich Borchers and Sergeant Hugo Bleicher. But these did not seem to me to add materially to the narrative which I was building up. They were mainly concerned with relating the processes by which the Germans themselves had tracked down and arrested The Cat and destroyed her Resistance organisation, and they were very much concerned with demonstrating the great ability—and nobility—of the *Abwehr* in general and of the two narrators in particular. And at least one of them, the book on The Cat written by a German journalist, Michael Soltikov, in collaboration with Bleicher, obviously stretched the romantic bow very wide indeed.

Finally I found a fresh and decisive source of help in a most unexpected place, the quiet presbytery of a small church in the village of Ardon, some miles south of Orléans. Here the elderly and genial Abbé Paul Guillaume has, in the years since the war, built up a remarkable library of documents of and about the French Resistance and is himself a correspondent of the official French Commission on the History of the Second World War. Many of my free days were spent motoring out from Paris to Ardon, to spend hours browsing among the Abbé's invaluable records, breaking off only long enough to enjoy

a hospitable luncheon at which the Abbé would generously seek to complete my education both about wartime France and also about the more recondite aspects of French wines. Through his intimate association with the Resistance, the Abbé had had access to a most valuable document concerning the story of The Cat—the strange autobiographical account of her life written by Mathilde Carré during the period of her imprisonment in England, under the title of *Memoirs of a Cat*. He had, in fact, written several articles on this book in the local Orléans newspaper, *République du Centre*, and he was good enough to place these articles at my disposal. All the extracts from the *Memoirs of a Cat* which are quoted in this book, with the exception of those in chapter sixteen which are otherwise acknowledged, have come from the articles of the Abbé Guillaume, with his kind permission.

Later still, I went to London and talked briefly with Colonel Buckmaster and at greater length with others who had worked under him in the French Section of the Special Operations Executive of the War Office which had been so closely concerned with the operations of The Cat, especially after her arrival in Britain. I also received valuable guidance from a number of other important figures in the affair, including Pierre de Vomécourt, known as 'Lucas', Major 'Benny' Cowburn, and Maitre Michel Brault.

I have thought it advisable to give these general indications of the sources of this narrative because it is such an unusual one that if I had not done so the reader might well have believed that the whole story was just the product of a fertile journalistic imagination. As far as I humanly could I have tried to steer clear of inaccuracies and, wherever it has been possible to do so, I have indicated in the relevant place the authority for individual statements.

To many readers there may seem some strange gaps in

this narrative; the final fate of Armand is left unsettled, there are no details of what exactly happened to The Cat during her period of imprisonment in Holloway and Aylesbury prisons, the British Home Office having politely but firmly refused me any information on this subject. In other quarters, too, in which I made my researches I found some strange reticences. Such things are inevitable when one is dealing with a spy story—for spies and all concerned with them traditionally prefer to avoid the public limelight, and the watch-dog eyes of security regulations are always on them. All that I have been able to put down here has been that which I have been able to establish as fact with a reasonable degree of certainty. As Chief Paris Correspondent of *The Daily Mail* I have to thank that newspaper for permission to write this book.

GORDON YOUNG

*Paris, 1957*



## CHAPTER I

# The Little Princess

O F all the young girl students who attended the daily lectures of the Law Faculty of the Paris Sorbonne in the middle twenties, few can have looked less like a potential spy and ‘double agent’ than little Mathilde Belard.

She was a small, chic figure, with abundant dark hair, strikingly intelligent green eyes, a lively sense of fun and, even at that age, a certain taste in dress. To all outward appearances she was the ideal type of the French *jeune fille bien élevée*.

She had been born at Châteauroux on February 19, 1910. Her mother came from a respectable family in the Jura; her father was an engineer of some talent; her brother Pierre was even at that moment beginning, as a cadet at the aristocratic military college of St. Cyr, a distinguished military career which was to culminate in valiant service with the French army in Indo-China.

A friend of the family who knew Mathilde Belard at this time told me, “She was always lively and gay and she made friends easily with other girls from good solid families. But she lived a quiet life herself—never went out to dance halls and student cafés like the girls of St. Germain do nowadays.”

She obtained her Sorbonne Law diploma without apparent difficulty, though the real passion of her life at that period was French literature. In the quiet of her own bedroom, Mathilde Belard spent hours pouring over the novels of the great French romantic writers, identifying

herself, one may suppose, with the heroines in all their passionate adventures. For she had, even at that age, a shrewd eye for the boy students and, it seems, an effortless gift for winning their admiration. Her personality and self-possession led one of the best friends of her young days to nickname her affectionately 'my little Princess'.

She had learned to be a somewhat independent girl because her mother, Madame Belard, a large, assertive woman who, like many French wives of her type, was undoubtedly the main driving force in the Belard family, had left Mathilde rather to herself in her younger days. The little girl had been put into a boarding-school for four years and at that period had proved to be only a mediocre pupil, a fact which caused some initial disappointment to Madame Belard.

A further disappointment was caused to her mother when, in the early 1930's, Mathilde brought home with her a modest young school-teacher named M. Carré and announced her intention of marrying him. The Belards were not pleased by this news. With typical French realism in such matrimonial matters, they did not disguise from Mathilde their opinion that a girl of her looks and upbringing could do better for herself than stake her future on the extremely modest prospects of the French scholastic profession. "Why don't you marry a nice engineer," said Madame Belard reproachfully, "somebody who could take on the succession of the business from your father?"

But the wilful Mathilde, now just as later in life, was determined to go her own strange way in arranging her personal affairs. And how did this remarkable young girl, still only in her early twenties, finally arrive at her decision on this first vital step in her life? She afterwards confided her astonishing secret to a friend: "I couldn't make up my mind at first, so in the end I took a set of dice and shook for it. The dice came out for marriage."

It was a characteristic action of the Mathilde whom

the world was later to know, saying ‘yes’ to life with apparent heartlessness and daring, yet taking such reckless risks to her own well-being.

So marry M. Carré she did, in September 1933, and she went with him to take up his post at an institute near the city of Oran in Algeria, and supplemented her husband’s modest income by working there also as a school-teacher herself.

By this time Mathilde Carré, now twenty-three, was growing from a girl into a woman if not of beauty at least of a striking appearance which people noticed. Her figure was the characteristically stocky one of many French women of her class. Her nose was a little too large and prominent, her jaw a shade too square and determined, and her wide, sensual mouth would part sometimes to reveal teeth which were widely-spaced and somewhat fang-like. Yet there was always a provocative look of intelligence in her staring green eyes—she suffered from short-sightedness all her life—and she had always a lively and original mind which made her remarkable in the somewhat stuffy society of a French overseas town.

Her marriage did not work out entirely well, and in the events of those years, just before the war, may well lie the key to some of the stranger aspects of Mathilde Carré’s character. It was years later that she confided a secret about her married life to M. Fougeres, the Examining Magistrate who was investigating her affairs as a preliminary to her final trial. “During the first six years of my marriage,” she at that time declared, “I was very happy, for I got on well with my husband. I should have liked to have had children, but my husband was unable to have any.

“Then, in 1939, my mother-in-law revealed to me that the father of my husband had died in a lunatic asylum—a fact which my husband had always hidden from me. It was soon after that that I decided to seek a divorce.”

This fact that the young Madame Carré was denied her normal desire for children may, perhaps, do something to explain the restless, driving energy with which she was later to pursue quite other objectives and ambitions.

However that may be, it was obviously not going to be long before a dynamic young woman like Mathilde Carré began to tire of her life as the childless wife of a quiet, scholarly Frenchman living inconspicuously in an outpost of the French Empire. Day succeeded brilliant, sunny day with a monotony and sameness of routine that Mathilde found as oppressive as the heavy heat of North Africa. Like many another dissatisfied wife, she must have finally told her husband brutally, "I'm bored, bored, bored." And she cast around among the limited European population of Oran for other diversions. Her association with the unfortunate M. Carré had undoubtedly ceased to be a real marriage long before its end.

In a sense it was almost a personal relief for Madame Carré when at last the war came, bringing with it an end to her life with her husband and a promise of that uncertainty and adventure which always stimulated her so much. M. Carré, recalled for service as a lieutenant in the French army, embarked for Syria in September 1939, and from that moment, so Madame Carré later told her friends, "I decided that my husband was dead for me."

So here at last, thanks to the war, was a chance to escape from the limited life of Oran back to metropolitan France, to renew contacts with her old friends and to launch into quite new activities. As quickly as she could, Mathilde Carré sailed from Algiers to Marseilles, stopped in Paris to see her parents and volunteered to the French Red Cross for service as a hospital nurse.

She went for training to a surgical hospital outside Paris and plunged into the new work with all the energy and enthusiasm with which she did everything. "She had inside her a power which was too great for such a

small body", as one of her friends once told me. "It drove her on and never let her rest. And whatever she was doing, she wanted always to excel."

And excel Mathilde Carré obviously did in those days when she was working in her new role of nurse. She was at the hospital each morning soon after eight and finished often late at night. When she attended her first surgical operation she nearly fainted, but she took a firm grip on herself and ever after that was able to bear the sights of the surgical wards without emotion or fear. She got on well with the hospital staff and, in the intervals of work, flirted impartially with the doctors and the soldier patients, so that the ward in which she served received the nickname, with good-humoured irony from the hospital staff, of 'Madame Carré's *chambre d'amour*'.

But the days of the 'phoney war' ended almost simultaneously with the completion of Madame Carré's nursing training. At the beginning of May 1940, just as the German panzer divisions began their lightning and victorious sweep into Belgium and Holland, she herself was transferred to a hospital on the French eastern front, just behind the Maginot line. Here, in those days when, in Britain, Churchill was becoming Premier, Madame Carré was having her first taste of war at close quarters, tending day and night the streams of refugees who poured in from the bombed areas along the front. Later she was transferred to a hospital at Beauvais, and always she won the praise of doctors and patients alike for her devotion to her work and her apparently inexhaustible energy.

Neither the macabre sights of field hospitals nor the perils of enemy bombing seemed to dismay this small but indomitable woman. Once, as she was going off with a doctor to tend some people wounded in a field, she herself was caught by a new wave of German dive-bombers overhead and had to take refuge by throwing herself into

a ditch. Her comment to the doctor afterwards was characteristic of her: "There's almost a sensual pleasure in real danger, don't you think? Your whole body seems suddenly to come alive."

Indeed the little princess was growing up now.

## CHAPTER 2

### Days of Despair

AND then, suddenly, the storm of disaster broke over France. It came so quickly that no one could keep pace with events. Weygand took over from Gamelin, Pétain became Vice-Premier, and the German tanks pushed their first pocket into France at Vervins and swept on towards Laon and Paris. Mathilde Carré had time to pay only a brief visit to her home in the Avenue des Gobelins, where she proudly showed her parents the military citation which she had received for her nursing service. Then, under orders, she moved south for new work in a hospital in Orléans, a city where, at the end of the First World War, she had gone to school for several years at the Lycée des Jeunes Filles.

And here in Orléans, by a chance encounter, she met an old friend of her childhood days, René Aubertin, with whom as a little girl of ten she had played when both their families had lived in the Jura. Aubertin, lively, energetic and in civilian life a talented engineer, now was a lieutenant in the 49th Tank Battalion and it was with delight that the two old friends encountered each other by chance in the streets of Orléans, teeming with refugees and troops. They talked of France's days of despair, of the increasing rumours that an armistice was impending, and together they reaffirmed their belief that, as Churchill had promised, the Allies would conquer in the end. It was a fateful meeting, for Aubertin was destined to play an important part in the subsequent activities of Mathilde Carré.

Madame Carré stayed only a few days in Orléans, for

that city was rapidly being overwhelmed by the tide of war. The hospital to which she had been assigned was already being evacuated. As she wrote of this period in her *Memoirs*: "Everywhere there was the same picture of the city being invaded by the general exodus, of the French army in collapse. The hospital was empty, the chief headquarters of the Orléans region was already in retreat. One heard nothing but those words 'retreat' and 'evacuation.' What was to be done? Some office or other gave me a travel order for Bordeaux with the advice, 'Get there any way you can.' "

For some days she was given asylum by members of a tank regiment quartered in one of the fine châteaux in the country outside Orléans. Finally she made her way south to Toulouse, riding part of the way in a bumping and swaying truck of the French Air Force among the ragged crowds of refugees streaming to the south.

It was an interminable journey, hampered by the tragic columns of fugitive families, men, women and children, moving always southwards in a straggling nondescript procession. There were the elderly men harnessed to handcarts in which they pulled their wives, children using their scooters, people sleeping at nights in cornfields and ditches, and, when daylight came again, the constant terror of the German dive-bombers in the scorching summer sunshine.

But at last Mathilde Carré reached Toulouse, though the city, when she got there, was in as great a state of confusion as Orléans had been. Still there remained for her this problem: what should she do next? Only one thing was obviously impossible for this restless little woman—to remain inactive. Somewhere in Toulouse there was said to be an English officer who was arranging passages to Britain. She sought him out, but he advised her to stay where she was. "There will be work for women like you in France," he told her.

So, in Toulouse Mathilde Carré stayed, drifting for the moment rather aimlessly round the crowded, chaotic town, meeting by chance once again René Aubertin, now in process of demobilisation from his tank unit. Again the two discussed the probable outcome of the war and again they agreed that, whatever happened, they personally would do all that lay in their power to defeat the German invader.

In the long evenings of waiting for something to turn up Mathilde Carré would seek to kill time by visiting cafés with a girl friend with whom she frankly discussed both the future of the war and the physical merits and possibilities of the uniformed young men who also sat drinking there.

It was one evening in one of these cafés, *La Fregate*, that Mathilde Carré had the encounter which was to change, basically and dramatically, the whole course of her life. For across the marble-topped tables that night among the teeming crowd of refugees and soldiers sipping their beers and aperitifs, her searching eye lighted on the handsome figure of a young Polish airman. He was slim and dark—more Latin-looking than Slavonic in appearance—with striking dark eyes, a prominent nose and hair smoothly plastered down on his head. He wore his uniform with an air. Their eyes met—and Major Roman Czarniawski was soon sitting drinking at her side.

"Why do you come to me," Mathilde Carré taunted him, "when there are plenty of other girls around here who are prettier?"

And, in broken French, with a serious look in his dark eyes, the Major replied: "Because you look so intelligent and gay. You know what I shall call you? My little Spitfire."

They met again next day, and many times again throughout that October of 1940. Madame Carré was quickly captivated by the lively Pole. "He had the will-

power of a spoiled child," she wrote of him in her *Memoirs*, "and I liked it."

Major Roman Czarniawski was not only a handsome and lively companion for Mathilde Carré, but he was also an able officer of the Polish air army. Although under thirty years of age he had attained at the outbreak of war the position of chief of the Intelligence Section of the 1st Polish Division, which fought in France in liaison with the 20th French Army Corps. Those who served with him at this period say that he was a methodical and thorough intelligence officer, the ideal type of what in the American army would be called a 'G2'. Among his able staff of assistants was one Lieutenant Bernard Krutki, a young doctor of languages of Poznan University, who spoke fluently Italian, French, English and Russian, and who also was destined later to play a part in the affairs of 'The Cat'.

At the time of the fall of France, Major Czarniawski's regiment had been stationed in Lunéville in the Vosges and there he had met a pretty French widow named Renée Borni, who was working at one of the local hotels. Renée Borni, as many another girl had done, fell an instant victim to the Polish major's charm and there, too, a liaison was begun which was profoundly to affect the coming drama.

But at this moment, in those busy days in Toulouse, the major said nothing to Mathilde Carré of the blonde Renée who was far away in Lunéville, but talked only of his love and admiration for his newly-found 'Spitfire', accepted with delight the nickname she bestowed on him of 'Toto' and discussed his determination to continue the war even though France had fallen. He told her how he had, near Lunéville, been taken prisoner by the Germans but had escaped with a fellow-officer. He told her something of what his role in the Polish Intelligence staff had been, and finally, after days of strolling together by the banks of the

River Garonne and sitting together in cafés, he proposed to her frankly that she should help him in the building up of a new and important network of Allied intelligence.

No idea could have suited Mathilde Carré better; this was something much more attractive than being a hospital nurse: it offered the prospect of excitement, intrigue, activity—all those things for which Madame Carré always yearned, plus a spice of physical danger, the actual grim extent of which probably at that time neither the major nor his eager partner fully realised.

Major Czarniawski was in touch with a Polish organisation in Marseilles which in turn had already established contact with London. The immediate need, as the major explained to Mathilde Carré, was to build up inside France an organisation which would maintain a steady flow of accurate information for the Allies on the activities of the Germans in occupied France. And to that end an even more pressing need was that his own imperfect knowledge of the French language should be improved. So, in the days that followed, in cafés and in quiet country lanes and in the little hotel bedroom which by now she was sharing with him, Mathilde Carré, one-time school-teacher, devoted her talents to making a Polish intelligence officer word-perfect in French.

Those were joyous, hectic days for the little, ambitious Frenchwoman and her newly-found Polish lover. There seemed nothing that the couple could not do together. Mathilde Carré's own recollection of these early days with her Polish major, as recounted in her *Memoirs*, is an ecstatic one and conveys something of the high excitement with which she entered upon her new enterprise:

I called him 'my little Toto' and often said to him "General, at your orders"—and we embraced each other and jumped and danced for joy in the room of our hotel. The whole world and the victory of the

world seemed to be in our hands. Life with Toto had wings. I did not know what I was doing but I had complete confidence in him. I thought that every time one wished for a thing with extreme fervour that thing became realised. And I noticed once more that the people whom I met on my way through life like that, and not in a conventional way, were always the best. One might say that God chooses them and puts them there for me at my side.

Together the couple planned to go to Paris to set up their organisation—but first there were preparations to be made, a journey to contact the Poles in Marseilles and, even more important for Madame Carré, a significant visit to Vichy. For, apparently at the suggestion of the Polish major, Mathilde Carré contacted pro-Gaullist members of the 'Deuxième Bureau', the French military intelligence service, who were still carrying on in Vichy and who appear to have welcomed her collaboration with enthusiasm. So it was from French officers—and especially from two, Commandant Simmoneau and Colonel Achard, that she learned the first elements of intelligence work, of code names, of invisible inks, of military formations.

In Vichy Mathilde Carré spent some fascinating weeks—by day learning the secrets of the spy's profession and by night sipping glassfuls of gin—her favourite drink—in the bar of luxurious Ambassadeurs Hotel, in the company of the crowd of American newspapermen who were covering the activities of the Vichy government at that time.

It was in this bar that in fact the name of 'The Cat' was born.\* For, as she curled up in a big leather armchair of the bar, her feet tucked under her skirts, her dark hair bobbing as she carried on a lively conversation with all

\* It was one of Madame Carré's British Security guards during her stay in London who later commented to me with some bitterness, "I can't think why they called her The Cat, old boy; she always looked more like a ferret to me."

who came near her, and as she nervously scratched on the leather of the chair like a cat scratching with its claws, the Americans came to nickname her 'Our little black cat'. And Colonel Achard of the Deuxième Bureau called her 'My little Persian Cat'. And when Major Czarniawski heard that he promptly decided: "In our organisation The Cat you shall be." And 'The Cat' from that moment on she was, while Major Czarniawski, it was agreed, would assume the pseudonym of 'Armand.' (And for the reader's convenience I will refer to him as such in the remainder of the book.)

Back in Toulouse, one more personal affair remained to be settled before the great adventure could begin—the tiresome matter of Mathilde Carré's husband, who suddenly turned up on leave from his French army unit and sought the company of his wife. To most other women less resolute than Mathilde Carré this visitation might have been expected to have brought not a little embarrassment. But already The Cat was beginning to show her claws—to exhibit that strain of complete ruthlessness which was to find such grim development in the months to follow. "Don't worry," Mathilde Carré told Armand reassuringly, "I will soon get rid of him."

M. Carré, at that moment fearing that all was lost for France in the war, urged his wife to return with him to their former refuge in North Africa. With calculating guile, she did not point-blank refuse, but told him that she would need first to go to Paris to fetch some personal belongings from her parents' flat. Meanwhile, she suggested, M. Carré himself might well go for a brief period of rest to the country. She told her husband nothing of Armand—and nothing, of course, of her ambitious espionage plans. Reluctantly, it may well have been, M. Carré agreed to his wife's proposal. A few days later he travelled, as she had suggested, to a place of rest in the country. He never saw his wife again. Months later, when

he found that his letters to the occupied zone of France were being returned unanswered and that he had lost all contact with his wife, M. Carré went to the French authorities and, it is reported, even appealed to Marshal Pétain personally for aid in locating her and persuading her to rejoin him. But all his efforts were in vain. The Cat's only reply was to initiate divorce proceedings in Paris. In the upshot, M. Carré, back with the French army for the invasion of Italy, died the death of a brave soldier in the fighting around Cassino.

Now at last, it seemed, the way was clear for The Cat to go stalking, for the eager, ambitious woman who was Mathilde Carré to show to handsome Armand, to show the French and British officials too, that a new Mata Hari was going into action. With the supreme energy which she put into everything she did, Mathilde Carré determined at that moment that she was going to be the greatest and most able Allied spy of the Second World War.

## CHAPTER 3

# Weaving the Web

IN the Paris of the autumn of 1940 few hearts were young and gay. The city was already putting on the stern aspect of an outpost occupied by the enemy. Everywhere floated the swastika flags of the invader, and the harsh red, white and black of those banners provided virtually the city's only colour. At night the black-out was severe. By day the streets looked strangely naked, since private cars had almost entirely disappeared, being replaced only by the staff cars and lorries of the *Wehrmacht*, dashing urgently on mysterious missions. The Metro and the few remaining familiar green omnibuses were constantly overcrowded, the shops were already now running short of supplies and the Place de l'Opéra had been made hideous by the forest of *Wehrmacht* military signposts which filled the centre of the square.

Yet gay in heart at their new enterprise, it seemed, were Armand and The Cat. They arrived in Paris in the cold mists of mid-November, travelling by separate routes across the controlled demarcation line between unoccupied and occupied France. For papers, Madame Carré had provided herself with a travel order from the French Red Cross while Armand, expert in such matters, had cheerfully forged for himself a French identity card in the name of Armand Borni. By agreement they met at an arranged rendezvous and Madame Carré took Armand to an apartment which she had rented and where she believed that they could live together and work quite undisturbed.

Next day two untidily dressed figures—for on this hurried journey Madame Carré had not bothered unduly about her clothes—appeared at the smart office near the Champs Elysées of a prominent Parisian lawyer, Maitre Michel Brault, who spoke English fluently and had long specialised on handling legal affairs for British and American clients in Paris.

After some hesitation the secretary admitted the two visitors. They presented Maitre Brault with a letter of introduction from his nephew, who had met Madame Carré in the unoccupied zone and, it appears, had, like so many other men, immediately been swept away by her charms. To prove to Maitre Brault the *bona fides* of his callers, his nephew had enclosed in his letter of introduction a photograph of his sister with her baby. His suspicions allayed, Maitre Brault listened to Madame Carré as she explained the reasons for the presence in Paris of herself and Armand and finally he even agreed to take the couple nominally and temporarily on to his office staff so that they could justify their presence in Paris to the authorities. It was a well-meant decision, but one which he was to have ample cause to regret.

Recalling this episode, Maitre Brault years later told me: “Madame Carré explained to me that she and Armand were forming an intelligence network in Paris according to instructions from the Polish general staff but also in agreement with the British and she asked me to introduce them to a number of people, which I am now sorry to say I did.”

Maitre Brault also travelled to Bordeaux with Armand and introduced the Pole to some contacts who might be of use to him in that important seaport.

So, thus were formed the first strands of the web which was soon to become the first great intelligence network of the war. Armand christened his organisation ‘Inter-Allied’, and it had before the year was out something like

two hundred agents spread all over France, with regular radio and courier communications with Marseilles and London. At the head of all this work were only Armand and his 'Little Cat'.

Those were hectic, gay and exciting days for the couple, who were far too busy to care about or even notice the austerities of war-time Paris. They seem to have gone into their perilous enterprise almost as light-heartedly as two children who have discovered a new game and with an almost child-like lack of realisation of the risks which they were running.

For the Paris of that winter of 1940 was a welter of confusion of thought and conflicting loyalties. When The Cat approached a Frenchman to seek his aid for Inter-Allied, she could never be certain whether the man would turn out to be pro-Allied or pro-Vichy, confident about the final outcome of the war or deeply despairing, trustworthy as a Resistance colleague or liable at the smallest provocation to denounce her and the whole organisation to the Germans.

But some Frenchmen there were who even in those darkest days never lost faith. One wet winter night, as she hurried through the city on her rounds, The Cat went into the Café Wepler for a quick supper. She found herself sitting at a table with a French officer, a lieutenant of the army medical services. It was this officer's task to meet the hospital trains as they came into Paris bringing the wounded soldiers with them. And he told The Cat of what had happened that very evening at the Gare du Nord. First a hospital train had pulled in with its tragic load of French troops, sick, mutilated and plunged in the silence of despair. Then, on the other side of the platform, another train had slowly steamed in, this one bearing a load of British troops, all seriously wounded too, and on their way to the Val de Grace hospital for treatment, as prisoners of war. The English Tommies

looked up from their stretchers and berths, peering through the steam-stained windows of the train out to the dark platform. Then they saw that the platform was lined with German troops. In a sudden spontaneous gesture of defiance, the wounded troops raised themselves as best they could from where they lay and, first falteringly, then more strongly, joined in the strains of the song that even every German knew—"It's a long way to Tipperary. . . ." And the French officer who told The Cat this story added admiringly, "You just can't defeat men like that."

Soon after their arrival in Paris, the couple moved to a more convenient flat at 14 Rue du Colonel Moll, just behind the Etoile. And here Armand transformed the large, well-lighted salon into something like an intelligence officer's room at staff headquarters. This Polish officer's fault was certainly never a lack of energy or courage but at the worst a failure to appreciate that espionage under the enemy's nose in occupied territory is something very different from intelligence work in the comparative security of a general staff headquarters. Maitre Brault who, in the early days, visited the couple in the Rue du Colonel Moll was horrified at the open display inside the flat of intelligence documents and of great staff maps on which the exact positions of *Wehrmacht* units in France had all been marked with the clarity and efficiency of the forthright military man.

"Those maps," Maitre Brault later related. "They were amazingly well-kept, but I found them ridiculously imprudent. Armand I liked and admired, but The Cat worried me almost from the start. For one thing, she would sometimes quite gaily boast of the personal contacts which she was having with people working for the Germans and with the Germans themselves—it was enough to scare you out of your wits!"

Indeed most of those people who were associated with Armand and The Cat in the days when they were build-

ing up their network and with whom I subsequently spoke agreed that the strange couple were activated more by enthusiasm than prudence. One of Armand's Polish friends, who later was arrested and sent to Buchenwald, told me, "When Armand came to see me to ask me to work for Inter-Allied he offered, 'Look, I'll tell you exactly who I am and what my real name is.' I told him, 'For God's sake don't do that.' He looked at me with great round trusting eyes and seemed quite hurt—he had made the offer only as a proof of friendship. But I had done some intelligence work in the First World War, and I knew that the less information you had about the people you were working for the better."

However that may be, for better or worse, Armand and The Cat worked night and day on Inter-Allied all through that grim, cold winter in Paris. They were starting from practically nothing and at times they were so short of funds, even for food and rent, that once Armand had to pawn his precious camera to tide them over until some money arrived from the Poles in Marseilles.

Everything had to be done at once—and fast: agents to be found, communications to be established, finance to be arranged. Armand pinned up on the wall a great map of France, which he divided clearly into sectors 'A' 'B' 'C' and so on. Each sector was to have its own chief who in turn would organise his own local agents working under him. In addition there were to be sections of Inter-Allied dealing specifically with such matters as reviews of the German and French press, with propaganda and with industry. To link the agents together and to keep the whole organisation in touch with Armand and The Cat at headquarters there had to be established a whole series of 'letter-boxes'—places where messages could safely be deposited and in due course collected by The Cat or her agents on their regular rounds. Among the 'letter-boxes' established by The Cat in the early days of their work was

one in the office of an agent for music-hall artistes on the big boulevards, one in a school for languages near the Opera and another, perhaps the most important, was in the charge of the woman who ran the basement cloak-room of the gay and gaudy Café La Palette, in happier days a famous artists' rendezvous of Montparnasse.

But first and above all, there were the agents themselves to be found and enrolled. That was a task calling for all the tact and powers of persuasion which The Cat seemed so abundantly to possess. For one thing, there was little money with which anybody could be paid for their services, so those who worked for Inter-Allied had to be persuaded to render the services—and take the consequent risks—entirely out of idealism and personal loyalty. It says much for Madame Carré's personal magnetism—and no doubt even more for the brave spirit of many French and Polish people in those dark days of defeat—that so many agents were so quickly found.

It was not an easy task. But The Cat, hurrying indefatigably around Paris in the dark fur coat and little bright red hat which she always wore so that they became almost a trade-mark, was all things to all men, and unfailing in the persuasive arguments she used. Some of those she tackled did not like working for the British, some saw no reason why they should work for a Pole, some were for de Gaulle and others against him—and some, in any case, did not relish the idea of taking orders from a woman. But on to all who seemed to offer the possibility of useful service The Cat turned her personal charm and her gift for persuasion, and there were few of those whose aid she sought whom she finally failed to recruit.

The Cat spread her own net far and wide and found valuable associates in many widely different walks of life. She outlined her projects with gay enthusiasm. Everyone she approached seemed to fall in with her suggestions and work indefatigably on the tasks which she assigned to

them. It was remarkable that one small woman could win so much confidence and loyalty. Even the other women whom she recruited, it seems, trusted her completely.

She had a letter of introduction from a mutual friend in Vichy to an attractive woman named Mireille Lejeune, who worked as a concierge in the Avenue Lamarck, in Montmartre. Mireille's husband, Charles Lejeune, was a handsome Brigadier de Police of the Paris Prefecture and thus was able to supply a fund of useful information. Even more important, he was able to secure blank identity cards and other police documents which were passed on to Armand and suitably filled in for the benefit of various members of the organisation. 'Boby Roland' was Charles Lejeune's code name in the network.

A few doors down the same Avenue Lamarck was another couple, the Hugentoblers, who came from Alsace-Lorraine. They too had complete faith in Madame Carré, or 'Micheline' as they affectionately called her, and they agreed without hesitation that their concierge's room could regularly serve as one of the 'post-boxes' for The Cat's communications. Theirs was a decision which was to have perhaps the most tragic consequences of all.

Then, only a few days after the arrival of Madame Carré in Paris, the telephone rang in the apartment of René Aubertin, by now back again at his old job as a civilian engineer. "It's me," she told him. "And I must see you urgently for I have good news for you." Aubertin met her without delay and she went on, "Everything is going to be all right after all. We can go on with the fight against the Germans just like we talked about doing when I met you in Toulouse. Now's your chance to help." Aubertin had never seen the girl he had known from childhood so enthusiastic or so sure of herself. He had no reason whatever to mistrust her, and he unhesitatingly agreed to co-operate. It was he who brought to the Inter-

Allied network one of the most valuable collaborators of all, the man who was known by the unpretentious code name of 'Uncle Marco'."

In fact Uncle Marco was a handsome and distinguished industrial chemist named Marc Marchal, aged fifty-one, with a high domed forehead, firm chin, smiling mouth and lively, intelligent eyes. As a young man he had worked his way through the Lyons School of Industrial Chemistry, had been wounded in the First World War, and later had founded in Paris his own business as an industrial chemist. By the time the Second World War arrived, Marchal was happily married with four children yet, at 49, he had promptly volunteered again for a tank regiment. It was while serving there as a lieutenant that he had met René Aubertin, who had been his superior officer, and the two men, both scientists, had formed an immediate and deep friendship. When France had fallen, Marchal returned to civilian life, but when his friends congratulated him on his safe return he told them, echoing the words of de Gaulle, "Not so fast—I joined up for the duration of the war, and for me the war isn't finished—it's only just beginning." He formed his own Resistance network among his many friends in army, university, industrial and scientific circles—many of them technicians of the most valuable kind—and when René Aubertin came to him and asked him on behalf of Madame Carré for his help, he carried over to the Inter-Allied organisation the whole of his small but highly skilled band.

And then, too, there was 'Paul'. His real name was Lucien de Roquigny, and he was a small, delicately built Polish aristocrat, with greying hair and thin, sensitive hands. Once he had been a lecturer in French at the University of Warsaw and the editor of a respected paper there called the *Echo de Warsowie* which was read by every foreign diplomat in Poland before the war. After the Nazi

invasion he had escaped to France by way of Hungary, and he was avid to continue the fight against those who had ravaged his country. He was gay and sparkling, with a perennially youthful enthusiasm, and while he composed, for the Inter-Allied organisation, brilliantly informative reviews of the German and French press, he simultaneously showed to Mathilde Carré such personal devotion that one of his friends could tell me of him later, "Paul was really in love with The Cat, of course."

But in love with Madame Carré, to a greater or less extent, seemed to be very many of the men who at that time came into contact with her. All of them were later to regret their devotion, but Paul paid for his admiration of The Cat most disastrously.

These people, then, of whom I have spoken, were the first of the brave and brilliant band of men and women, French and Polish, who, undismayed in defeat, had the courage to ally themselves with the first of the major Resistance organisations formed in France. Their stories and their personal tragedies, which will be related in this book, were typical. Scores of others, too numerous to mention individually and located all over France, followed in their footsteps and rendered, in their various ways, noble services to the Allied cause.

## CHAPTER 4

# Inter-Allied Calling London

SO now, within only a few weeks of their arrival in Paris, the indefatigable Armand and Mathilde Carré had an organisation actually in being and growing every day in effectiveness and extent. The information, much of it very valuable, was coming in rapidly: the detailed staff map—so meticulously kept by Armand—of the German army's dispositions all over France was being filled in with more and more data: the most pressing immediate problem was that of communication with London.

Some of Armand's own Polish friends were quickly recruited to help in maintaining Inter-Allied's lines of communication. For contact with the other Poles in the organisation there was Armand's former A.D.C. from staff headquarters, Lt. Bernard Krutki, who now operated under the code name of 'Christian'. Armand's former coding clerk, a cheerful stocky Pole named Stephane, volunteered for service as a courier between Paris and the Polish headquarters in the Villa Mimosa at Marseilles. And a Polish commercial artist, Wladimir Lipsky, to whom they gave the code name of 'Observator', undertook to make the drawings of the secret maps of German installations, aided by his seventeen-year-old daughter Cipinka, who was training to be an industrial designer.

And then, too, there was Stanislas Lach, a tall dark-haired Pole, who before the war had been a mechanic in the Citroen factory in Paris. Armand had been introduced to him by the Poles in Marseilles, and Lach, who lived

with his wife in a tiny room on the Isle St. Louis, agreed that he, too, would act as a courier for Inter-Allied operating under the appropriate code name of 'Rapide'. The special task of Rapide was to take the micro-films of maps and documents which were prepared in Paris, and catch the evening train from the Gare de Lyons for Marseilles. Once the train had left, Rapide would lock himself in the lavatory of a previously agreed coach, unscrew a mirror and conceal the micro-films behind it. Then he would leave the train at some intermediate station, usually Dijon. A courier from Marseilles would board the same train at Avignon in time to retrieve the precious films before the arrival at the terminus.

It was Lach himself who, in Paris years after the war, gave me some account of those first exciting days of Inter-Allied.

He told me how, in addition to acting as courier for Armand, he had during his travels across France picked up what information he could about German military troop movements and also about the losses of *Luftwaffe* planes. At nights he would go sometimes on his bicycle to the forest of Senart and hide in the bushes near the German aerodrome at Melun-Villaroche. "I used to count carefully the bombers as they took off for their raids on London," said Lach, "and then wait there until four or five in the morning when the planes returned and count them again. In that way we pieced together some idea of German air losses in the early days."

Sometimes Lach himself would have to cross the demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied France. Once Armand sent him down to Marseilles to fetch some money for the organisation. At the Villa Mimosa in Marseilles the Poles gave Lach a million and a half francs—money which had come to them from Britain via Lisbon and Madrid.

"I knew a few places where it was possible to cross the

demarcation line," Lach related, "and I tried to get back to one of these near Montceau les Mines. The best time to cross was at mid-day, just when the sentries were changing duties.

"On that particular day I was just coming out of a wood on to the main road when the sentry saw me. He sprayed the road with bullets, but missed me and I leaped into a hedge. Somehow he lost sight of me and I escaped. I hid up in the house of a Polish tailor I knew in the district. My friend warned me, 'You can't possibly go to the railway station, it's surrounded by German troops.' So he went off himself and bought me a ticket to Paris. Then when the train came in I got into it by crossing the railway tracks from the far side of the station and finally got safely back to Armand with the money. But that was about the narrowest squeak I had in those first days."

So, throughout the late winter months of 1940, 'Rapide' Lach continued his journeys between Paris and Dijon, carrying the micro-films to the station inside the tube of his bicycle pump, then secreting them in the agreed hiding-place in the train. And without fail the documents arrived safely at their destination in Marseilles.

But the method of sending micro-films and documents across the demarcation line to Marseilles and thence to London was a long and laborious one. Sometimes information—of German troop transports or of coastal shipping movements, for instance—did not arrive in London until too late to be of practical service. Obviously a system of radio transmission direct from Paris must be arranged.

Early in 1941 Armand made a secret trip to Marseilles. He returned to Paris with completed arrangements for transmissions to London, and a special code and, in addition, with some much needed financial help. A French technician, Max Desplaces, was found to help construct and work the first radio transmitter which

operated from the apartment in the Rue du Colonel Moll. And later other transmitters with other operators were installed in other parts of the city in order to forestall as far as possible the danger of discovery by the German radio-detection vans which began to operate in Paris later in that year. One radio set was established in an artist's studio in the Faubourg Saint Honoré.

So now the whining music of high-pitched dots and dashes was on its way nightly across the channel from blacked-out Paris to blacked-out, bombarded London, the messages with that introduction which became so familiar to the British girl operators at the receiving end, and so highly prized at that time by British intelligence—the opening which began, 'To room 55a, War Office, London: The Cat reports . . .'

For that which The Cat reported right through the spring, summer and autumn of 1941 was both accurate and, without question, of the greatest possible service to the Allied cause. It was the result of Armand's painstaking inspiration and of the devoted efforts of many able men and women. From Cherbourg and Le Havre came news of strategic shipping movements. From experts on the French railways came information about the trains which moved the *Wehrmacht's* supplies and men, just what they were carrying and just when and where they were going. There was news of ammunition dumps and other bombing targets for the R.A.F. There were summaries of the German and controlled French press available on the day the papers appeared. And, at longer intervals by courier, there came from Armand and The Cat a stream of maps of airfields and diagrams of factories and detailed reports on German army and French civilian morale.

Through his well-placed friends, Uncle Marco enabled The Cat to send to Britain a complete set of timetables of German military trains, and a quantity of scientifically

accurate advice on the best ways to sabotage certain factories which were already working for the Germans.

Uncle Marco, indeed, was indefatigable. On one occasion he and The Cat took a journey to Orly aerodrome outside Paris, which was being used by the *Luftwaffe*. Opposite the airport was a small café outside of which a notice board proclaimed that it was 'For Sale'. "That's just the place we need," said Uncle Marco jovially. So The Cat presented herself at the café in the guise of a possible purchaser and asked permission for her 'architectural adviser' to look over the building and make a few rough sketches for possible alterations. The first floor of the café commanded a splendid view of the aerodrome, and while The Cat engaged the proprietor in conversation, it was not long before Uncle Marco, upstairs, had jotted down in his notebook full details not only of the *Luftwaffe* planes using the runways but also of the hangars and anti-aircraft installations.

Another coup at an airport was also organised by the ingenious Uncle Marco. This was an airfield outside Paris where the Germans were in the course of building underground hangars. Making friends with some of the workers on the site, Uncle Marco, experienced chemist that he was, arranged that there should be an 'accidental' infiltration of water into one of the hangars, the water being admixed with a certain chemical substance which rotted the hangar's supporting pillars. The plan worked splendidly—so well that, as Uncle Marco subsequently told a friend, the hangar actually collapsed just twenty-four hours sooner than he had calculated that it would.

And Armand himself, working until the early hours of every morning, seemed to leave nothing forgotten. With the aid of The Cat—who put it into perfect French for him—he sent out a circular to the agents of Inter-Allied throughout France explaining the aims and ideals of the organisation, giving counsels of prudence and 'security'

(alas that poor Armand himself did not always follow his own counsels more closely!) and detailing the kind of information which was required.

The first questionnaires sent out to agents were brief and simple, but as Inter-Allied developed, they became increasingly detailed. Typical of the kind of questions which agents all over France were invited to answer were these:

Full name and both home and office addresses of the German commandant in the region?

Approximate numbers of German troops seen in the town?

Identity marks seen on troops in cafés and restaurants, and on *Wehrmacht* staff cars and trucks?

Location of German barracks?

Exact markings on all aircraft seen at the local airfield?

Details of all work being done in local factories, numbers of French and foreign workers employed and their morale.

Local anti-aircraft defences and any special camouflage work being carried out in the area?

And in the sphere of propaganda and political warfare the agents of Inter-Allied were specially asked to send in 'any material which might possibly be of service to the B.B.C.'

The work of Inter-Allied on occasion did not even stop short of violent encounters with the enemy, in at least one of which Uncle Marco, despite his fifty years, was involved. Hearing that special research on germ warfare was being carried out by the Germans in a French laboratory at Vincennes, Uncle Marco determined to obtain for his fellow scientists in London a specimen of the germ culture involved. On the night of January 18 1941, working alone, he broke into the Vincennes factory. But he was surprised by a night-watchman, engaged him in a quick, sharp fight and finally escaped with a bleeding jaw and torn clothes.

But as the flow of Inter-Allied information to London

increased, so did its effectiveness. Time and again, sometimes within a few hours of one of those radio tips beginning 'The Cat reports . . .' being received in London, British bombers or fighters would be on their way to France to strafe a German troop train or blow up an ammunition dump. Then would come back to the listening post in the Rue du Colonel Moll the thanks and congratulations of London, and The Cat and Armand, and Aubertin and Uncle Marco and all the rest of the intimate band who formed the brains trust of Inter-Allied, would rub their hands with joy.

With characteristic impudence and daring, The Cat herself deliberately sought out personal encounters with German officers, chatting to them pleasantly in the Metro, in restaurants and cafés—then going home to add to Armand's military reports some new detail which she had thus acquired.

One typical such encounter is described in her *Memoirs*. In the Duménil Café opposite the Montparnasse station, Madame Carré was taking tea one afternoon when a German officer entered and sat down beside her. "Excuse me, Madame," said he, "but I would like to ask some information of you."

"With pleasure," replied Madame Carré to the officer with a smile, "but first I would like to ask you something myself."

"By all means, Madame," said the German politely.

"You are wearing the uniform of an officer of the *Luftwaffe*, but I don't believe that you are a flier and I don't seem to recognise that flash on your shoulder."

"I'm what you call in France a Colonel of the Supply section," said the officer, and he added with some degree of pride, "I'm responsible for the *Luftwaffe* supplies for the whole of the Bordeaux area, you know."

"Oh, I see," said The Cat, with a casual air. "Well now, what is it I can do for you?"

The talkative Colonel only wanted to know where he could buy a box of tennis balls in Paris. Madame Carré told him just where he could find them—and with rapidly growing cordiality the conversation continued over the tea-cups. The armchair Colonel of the *Luftwaffe*, happy to have found such an agreeable woman companion to talk to, told The Cat how he was the son of an important official in Stuttgart, how happy he had been in the years before the war when he had been a student in Paris, how greatly he admired French culture. Inevitably the talk turned to the war, and the German began the customary propaganda line, of how Hitler was waging the war only to create a new and glorious Europe, how the decadent English were already practically beaten since they had no army, no navy and only enough aeroplanes to fly occasionally over France and machine-gun a few civilians.

But with energy and quick intelligence, Madame Carré demolished the Colonel's arguments one after the other. Finally the German broke down. Looking her straight in the face, he said, "We are too intelligent, you and I, Madame, to go on talking like a couple of propagandists. If I'm honest with you, I am disappointed in the French, because I never thought they would accept the armistice—I believed they would all solidly follow de Gaulle. As for Hitler, he's a gambler; he may go on winning for a bit but sooner or later he'll lose, like gamblers always do in the end, and it's England who is going to win."

Then the couple looked up and saw an elderly Frenchman on the other side of the café staring at them with a hostile glare. "He thinks you are a collaborator," whispered the German officer to Madame Carré, "I suppose I'd better leave you." And the *Luftwaffe* Colonel, whom Madame Carré afterwards confessed she found to be '*très sympathique*', left her to make her own way home and write a new and interesting report for Armand.

On another encounter with a German officer, this time

from the Gestapo, it was The Cat's very impudence and daring which saved her.

Armand had asked her to make a journey to the port of Brest to report on the extent of the damage done there by the R.A.F. bombings. Once there she found that the gallant people of that city were still staunchly pro-British despite the extent to which civilian buildings had inevitably suffered in the air raids which had been made on the harbour. Walking down the half-ruined Rue de Siam, The Cat saw a shoe-shop which had had its whole shop-front blown out but which was still carrying on 'business as usual.' An elegantly dressed customer asked one of the sales-girls, "Are you really going to keep the shop open in conditions like this?" And firmly the girl replied, "Don't you know the shops in London are carrying on, Madame, in spite of the Blitz?"

Because of the prevailing pro-British sentiments of the people of Brest, Madame Carré, with typical impudence—and imprudence too—found it amusing while she was in that city to pretend to be an Englishwoman herself, and she insisted on going around speaking to people in French with a well-assumed English accent. It was a stupid and gallant gesture and, inevitably, it landed her in trouble. She took the night train back from Brest to Paris, and when she arrived at the Paris station she found she was being followed by a good-looking young German in civilian clothes. He spoke a few words to her, then said, "But you speak French quite perfectly, Madame!"

"You don't expect a Parisian woman to have some sort of accent, do you?" asked Madame Carré.

"Well, Madame," said the young man, "I'm an officer of the Gestapo and we had a telephone call from Brest that there was a woman in a black fur coat and a red hat with a strong English accent travelling on the train to Paris. What were you doing in Brest?"

For a moment it seemed to Madame Carré that her situ-

ation was somewhat perilous. She decided there was nothing to do but brazen it out.

"You want to know the truth—the whole truth?" she asked the young Gestapo officer, flashing a dazzling smile at him.

"Why, certainly," he said.

"Well then I'll tell you, though it must sound quite ridiculous. People have been talking so much about the R.A.F. raids, and arguing for and against them. I'm a very inquisitive woman, you know, and I had nothing at all to do, so finally I decided I'd go to Brest and have a look for myself. And as for my English accent, that was just a joke; I just put it on to see how the people in Brest would react. It never struck me to consider how the Germans themselves might react. Now wasn't that silly of me?"

The Gestapo officer broke into a smile. "Well, I suppose it really takes a typical Parisian to think of a joke like that. That's really funny, that is. Couldn't you let me take you out to lunch?"

Madame Carré, always eager for a new adventure, promptly agreed. And the two spent a pleasant lunch hour together, with the Gestapo officer confiding in her—for The Cat, it seemed, could win confidences from everyone—of how his mother came from Ireland, how he had been wounded in the ankle and how he didn't *really* like working for the Gestapo at all.

By midsummer of 1941 the work of Inter-Allied had grown so greatly that London was asking for direct personal contact with Armand himself. A Lysander came to fetch him at a secret rendezvous—and he was back again within a few days, full of enthusiastic new plans for the future.

Meanwhile, The Cat had received a warning that it was becoming dangerous to operate the radio much longer from the apartment in the Rue du Colonel Moll. The German radio detection vans had been seen in the area,

very close indeed to the apartment. Armand and The Cat swiftly decided to change their headquarters. After some searching in Paris, The Cat found what seemed to them both an ideal new situation. It was the upper part of a little house high up in Montmartre. The ground floor of the house was occupied by an elderly Frenchwoman named Madame Blavette, a widow of a colonel of the First World War. To her The Cat confidentially explained that Armand, her cousin, was in search of complete tranquillity, that he needed to work undisturbed and often late at night because he was—though this of course must remain a secret between them—engaged in a little bit of trading on the French black market. This was an explanation for nocturnal comings and goings which was enough to satisfy any reasonable Frenchwoman at that period of the war when half the population of the country was, indeed, forced occasionally to engage in some illegal transaction or other for the sake of gaining some small additional comfort in life.

There could not have been a more innocent looking refuge than the little brick house with a red roof which was number 8 Rue Villa Léandre. The Rue Villa Léandre just off the wide Avenue Junot which leads up to the heart of Montmartre, is a small cul-de-sac of three-storied residences looking more like a row of London mews cottages than any typical Montmartre buildings. It is a private road, at the entrance to which is a memorial plaque to the artist and humorist Charles Léandre, after whom the street is named.

So Armand made his move into this secluded retreat—but he made another move just at this period, and one which was perhaps his greatest mistake of all. He invited his former mistress from Lunéville, Renée Borni, to join him in Paris.

Armand's partnership with Madame Carré had, at this time, lasted for about ten months. They had shared suc-

cessive apartments and they had worked together day and night. Yet now Armand apparently felt the need for the support of somebody more gentle, devoted and feminine than his dynamic partner Madame Carré could ever be, so he brought Renée, a simple, uncomplicated girl, to share his life once more. And from the moment that Renée appeared on the scene, Mathilde Carré certainly regarded her with the cold and hostile eyes of a bitter rival. There is no record of what exactly passed between Renée and Mathilde Carré, but what is certain is that the two women formed an instant and implacable hatred for each other, a thing which Armand might well have expected to happen. For not only were Renée and The Cat rivals for the attention of the handsome Pole, but they were also temperamentally as different as two women could be—Renée warm, impulsive and not particularly profound; Mathilde Carré ruthless and sophisticated. Renée from the start instinctively distrusted Mathilde. And Madame Carré at no time made the slightest attempt to disguise her frank opinion that Renée Borni was a stupid little girl, quite unworthy of Armand's devotion. In The Cat's resentment of Armand's decision may well lie the key to much which happened later.

However that may be, Armand now devoted himself to teaching Renée Borni the straightforward task of coding and decoding radio messages and from that time on, under the Resistance name of 'Violette', she became the principal coding clerk of Inter-Allied. And Mathilde Carré, making the best of the situation, took up new quarters, a room in the house of an elderly French lady named Madame Alice in the steep Rue Cortot, not far from the very studio in which Maurice Utrillo painted some of his most famous pictures of just that corner of Montmartre, of the adjacent Rue St. Vincent and of the famous Montmartre vineyard, just across the street.

And despite the personal domestic problems of Armand,

the work of Inter-Allied continued unabated. The messages of congratulation from London became increasingly frequent and as the autumn came Armand permitted himself—with what folly!—to write a lengthy and detailed record of the organisation's activities and successes under the complacent title: *One Year of Inter-Allied*.

He went even further. For the anniversary of the foundation of the network, on November 16, 1941, Armand staged a small 'surprise party' in the Rue Villa Léandre and invited a few select members of his team there to drink a triumphant toast and—this was the surprise—to hear a special message of congratulation which was to be sent to them by the Continental service of the B.B.C.

It was a memorable gathering, but not, as it turned out, a particularly gay one. For anxiety overshadowed the assembly. Only a few days before, Armand and The Cat had heard that, for the first time, one of their agents in the Cherbourg area had been arrested. The details of this incident were to become fully known to them all too soon. And this was not the only presage of danger. The Hugentoblers of the Avenue Lamarck had told Mireille that they had received a brief visit from the Gestapo, who had searched their concierge's room, found nothing, and had gone silently away. And only a couple of days before the anniversary gathering Armand himself had confided to his fellow-Pole Wladimir Lipsky: "I'm a bit worried at the moment. There's something going on, and I have the feeling that I'm being followed."

One of those invited to the anniversary party was René Aubertin. After working that afternoon with The Cat in her room in the Rue Cortot, Aubertin had gone with her to dinner at the Montmartre restaurant, Chez Ma Cousine, taking along with them Mireille Lejeune. After dinner they took Mireille home and went on together to Armand's party.

But Aubertin, at least, began to feel at an early stage of the gathering the prevailing atmosphere of nervous tension. Looking back at that fateful evening years later he related to me: "I remember it was a Sunday. The atmosphere was not gay. I think we felt in our hearts that we were already in danger." (The police word *brûlé* was the one which Aubertin used.) "And then, there was the trouble between the two women there that night. We all realised that such a situation as that which existed between Violette and The Cat couldn't be healthy."

There were just under a dozen of them sitting round in Armand's room that night including Armand himself and Renée Borni, André Lecourt, René Aubertin, a Polish radio operator and Claude Jouffret who was destined to be sentenced by a French court, in the end, for working with the Germans after his arrest.

The group sat and chatted as Violette served the drinks—champagne, orangeade and lemonade. There was desultory talk and, one of the guests recalled, a sudden little outburst of a silly jealous dispute between the two women, after Renée had boasted to The Cat about a new fur coat which Armand had given her. And everybody waited for the appointed moment. At last the B.B.C. announcer began the news bulletin with the familiar words: '*Ici Londres*'. Those present listened with even greater attention than usual to the opening strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, to the news headlines and to the more detailed news bulletin which followed. And they leaned eagerly forward in their chairs, straining their ears, as the announcer's voice continued: '*Voici quelques messages personnels*'. At last their special message came. '*Nous souhaitons bon anniversaire à la famille réunie à Paris*', said the voice, and then repeated the message at dictation speed: '*Nous sou-hai-tons—bon anni-ver-saire . . . à . . . la . . . famille . . . réunie . . . à . . . Paris*'.

Everybody smiled for a moment and gave a sigh of relief.

This was positive proof that the Inter-Allied group were not lonely and forgotten in their danger. A little later that evening Armand's operator, too, sent back to London a little anniversary message. '*Vive la liberté*', it said, and gave the Inter-Allied call-sign.

That was all. The party broke up about 11 p.m. And that was the last exchange of messages between London and Inter-Allied, as an organisation of the Resistance, which was ever to take place.

## CHAPTER 5

### Disaster

IT was not in Paris but in a small and smoke-filled sailors' café in Cherbourg that the Germans first came upon that trail which led them to the destruction of the Inter-Allied organisation.

One night in mid-October of 1941 a young German corporal had been sitting in a corner of a café in Cherbourg harbour drinking with an elderly and rather alcoholic French docker. The docker was a personal friend of the corporal because both men at that time were working in the petrol depot of the local *Luftwaffe*. As one glass followed another the Frenchman confided to his German drinking-friend that he was worried. When he had been sitting one night in an air raid shelter, he revealed, a woman neighbour of his named Madame Buffet had got into conversation with him and had asked him to provide her with details of aeroplanes and supplies at the depot at which he was employed. He had given her a little information, admitted the old Frenchman, but the matter was troubling him. It was a relief to be able to talk to a jolly good pal like the German corporal. And, lifting his glass yet again, he concluded, with maudlin self-pity, that what a man really needed at such anxious and uncertain times as these was a true *friend*.

The German corporal listened sympathetically and carefully to every alcoholic word and, being a dutiful soldier reported on the incident to his *Luftwaffe* superiors. "Look, like a case of attempted espionage, sir," said he. And his

officer no doubt agreed. But questions of espionage were not the immediate concern of the *Luftwaffe*, but of the Third Section of the *Abwehr*, which, indeed, existed precisely for the purpose of tracking down enemy agents. The headquarters of that section of *Abwehr III* which dealt with the whole area of north-west France was known as the 'Abwehr St. Germain' and was located in a luxurious villa at Maisons Laffitte which the Germans had commandeered after they had arrested the owner, the French Jewish actor Harry Baur, well-known even to foreign cinema-goers through his performances in such films as '*Les Misérables*' and '*Carnet de Bal*'. (Baur died in 1943, aged 63, as a result of the tortures he had suffered during his imprisonment.) So it was to the Harry Baur villa outside Paris that there came one day in mid-October a message giving details of the story of Madame Buffet, no doubt with the addition of that conventional note of officials the world over, 'Passed to you for action, please'.

But this scrap of information, which had failed to arouse any fever heat of interest at the Cherbourg depot of the *Luftwaffe*, was eagerly seized on by the St. Germain *Abwehr*. They had at that time never heard the words 'Inter-Allied', but for months it had been apparent to the Germans that a well-organised system of Allied espionage was at work reporting their troop movements, coastal defences and supply dumps and generally guiding the Royal Air Force to profitable targets. Indeed matters had reached a stage at which the *Abwehr* itself had begun to come under considerable criticism from the other branches of the German armed forces for their failure to end or even, apparently, to interrupt the flow of secret information to the Allies. The conscientious officers of the *Abwehr* St. Germain under their commander Major Eschig, spending day after day in their comfortable villa, had grown more than a little tired of the veiled reproaches of

their more active comrades who seldom failed to make clear their opinion that *some* officers had singularly cushy jobs!

Thus, as soon as this first clue from Cherbourg was received at St. Germain, no time was lost by Major Eschig in promoting rapid action. To Cherbourg in a staff car was dispatched one of the more energetic of the *Abwehr* officers, a certain Captain Erich Borchers, who before the war had been a journalist on a Nazi newspaper in the Rhineland. But Borchers was far from word-perfect in French and when he got to Cherbourg he found himself in need of somebody who both knew the situation in that city and could also act for him as an interpreter. In all cities the Field Security Police stood at the disposal of the *Abwehr* for help and for carrying out arrests; so to the Security Police of the *Luftwaffe* Borchers first applied. On that particular day there was nobody in the *Luftwaffe's* Security office who appeared able to help. So, impatiently, Captain Borchers hurried on to the corresponding office of the army and there he encountered just the man he needed. In temporary charge of the army's Field Security office on that particular afternoon was Sergeant Hugo Ernst Bleicher. It was a fateful meeting; at that moment neither of the men could have guessed that the apparently humble Sergeant in a small office in Cherbourg was destined to win celebrity in the official records of German counter-espionage in connection with many remarkable episodes including, a few years later, the arrest at St. Jorioz of Captain Peter Churchill and 'Odette', the story of which has been very adequately told elsewhere, both in book and motion picture.

Unlike Captain Borchers, Sergeant Bleicher was a man with a cosmopolitan background and a command of foreign languages. He came of respectable bourgeois German stock. His father had owned a prosperous bicycle shop at Tettnang, near Lake Constance, where Hugo had

been born on August 9, 1899. He had been educated at Ravensburg University and, after being rejected by the Kaiser's navy on account of defective eyesight, had been apprenticed as a clerk in a Ravensburg bank. Called up at the age of seventeen to the Pioneer Corps in the First World War, Bleicher had been captured by the British at Verdun, interned in a prisoner-of-war camp at Abbeville, where he had greatly improved his knowledge of both the English and French languages, and finally repatriated in 1919 back to Tettnang.

At the end of the First World War, a studious and hard-working young man whose big eyes blinked behind heavy spectacles, Bleicher had at one time cherished ambitions to become a concert pianist, for he had an undeniable talent for music. But his talent was apparently never sufficient to earn him a solid living in this precarious profession and, probably against his will, he returned to the world of commerce. For a time he worked as an interpreter for the railway authorities at Wiesbaden, then in a tax office at Mainz, and then in 1923 he went to Morocco for a German export firm on whose behalf he opened a bazaar at Tetuan. But in 1927 the company went bankrupt and Bleicher returned to Germany to work for a firm of exporters of chemical goods in Hamburg. He married, in 1929, a Fräulein Lucie Mueller, with whom he set up a home in the respectable suburb of Poppensbuettel, and by whom he had one son. When Hitler came to power, Bleicher, no doubt for solid business reasons, became a member of the Nazi party.

Then, when the second German war began, Bleicher, because of his fluent knowledge of both French and English, was mobilised as a member of the Field Security Police, for which he spent a period of training at Duisberg before following in the wake of the German invasion into Holland in the spring of 1940.

The ensuing months were a period in which the ambi-

tious Bleicher felt, as many another soldier of many a nationality has done, that the army was sorely wasting a good man's talents. He spent a period of hanging about in The Hague, where his section of the Security Police found nothing particular to do. Then he was moved for a fortnight to the comfortable quarters of the Terrace Hotel in Paris for security work during the visit of Hitler to the French capital. Later he was transferred to the little town of St. Lo in Normandy, where his stay was uneventful except for the fact that it was there he met a French-woman named Suzanne Laurent with whom, putting thoughts of his wife in Hamburg studiously behind him, he struck up an immediate and passionate association. His liaison with Madame Laurent lasted throughout the period of his war-time service in France.

Bleicher was transferred to Cherbourg in May 1941, a dull uneventful assignment, as it seemed to him, of which the only compensation was that the faithful Suzanne was able and willing to follow him there. Yet still it seemed to Bleicher that he was a flower blooming unseen, a man of talents whose rightful chances of promotion looked very like passing him by.

Therefore it was with both joy and enthusiasm that Sergeant Bleicher responded to the appeal for help made to him that October day by Captain Borchers of the *Abwehr*. From that moment on, it may be assumed, the ambitious and able Bleicher can have thought of little else but what success in tracking down this Allied espionage organisation was going to mean to him.

There is no doubt that Bleicher had a gift amounting to genius for the interrogation of prisoners. While the reader may have his own opinion of the claims made in all the German accounts of the questioning of captives that it was 'all done by kindness,' there seems no doubt that Bleicher did use, wherever he saw a profitable opportunity of doing so, psychological means of cajoling information

out of prisoners rather than the method of non-stop beatings and tortures used by the toughs of the *Sicherheitsdienst*, whom he and his colleagues of the *Abwehr* affected to despise. His long training as a business man and salesman, which had provided him with a gift for languages and a talent for negotiation, certainly stood him here in good stead.

So, together the two Germans found, arrested and interrogated the loquacious dock worker and within a remarkably short time, it seems, he was telling them all he knew. Madame Buffet, he said, was undoubtedly working for an important Allied intelligence network. Who was at the head of it he did not know, but he did know that, once a month, the head of the section dealing with north-west France—a man whom he knew only as 'Kiki'—came to Cherbourg by train to fetch the information which Madame Buffet had collected and leave money for the payment of the agents. Kiki arrived, said the man, always on the first, second, or third day of every month.

By then it was still only mid-October, so there was no chance of pouncing on Kiki for some days yet. While they waited impatiently in Cherbourg, Borchers and Bleicher in the meantime arrested Madame Buffet and in her apartment found—again an example of that reckless self-destructive efficiency of Inter-Allied—not only whole stacks of notes of the secret information which had been gathered, but also a list, carefully and clearly compiled, of some twenty or more of the local agents—postmen, dock workers, policemen, railwaymen—who were regularly contributing to the service. All of these small people too were quickly rounded up, but none knew anything at all about 'The Chief' in Paris to whom their information was ultimately sent. With growing impatience, and even anxiety, it may be assumed, Borchers and Bleicher waited on for the turn of the month which would bring Kiki to Cherbourg.

November the first came, and the Germans, taking the arrested docker from his prison cell, placed him at the exit to Cherbourg station so that he could identify Kiki for them as he stepped out of the train. But on that first day no such person appeared. It was not until November the third that, as the passengers passed through the railway barrier, the docker decoy went up to one of them and tapped him on the shoulder. Immediately the German police moved in—and the two men were hustled off in a Security Police car to Cherbourg fortress.

The arrested Kiki turned out to be a former non-commissioned officer of the French air force named Raoul Kiffer, who related that he had been recruited in Paris for work as an agent of Inter-Allied. But even after days and nights of interrogation by the two Germans he persisted in maintaining that he did not know the identity of Armand, the head of the organisation, and had no idea where his headquarters might be. Kiffer declared that his only method of communication with Armand was through the medium of the 'letter-box' maintained by the woman who kept the cloak-room in the basement of the Café La Palette in Montparnasse.

So back to Paris the two Germans took Kiffer and, speaking with all the possible appeal of one non-commissioned officer to another, Bleicher seems finally to have persuaded the Frenchman that it would be best for everybody concerned, including himself, to collaborate fully with the *Abwehr* in locating Armand and putting an end to his activities. (In the upshot, Kiffer collaborated so whole-heartedly with his new-found German friends that he was tried for treason before a Paris court in 1949 and served a term in prison.)

After he had spent some days in Fresnes, Kiffer, who had apparently now fully convinced the Germans of his readiness to co-operate loyally with them, was released and was sent to the Café La Palette to deposit a note with

the white-haired cloak-room attendant asking for an urgent rendezvous with Armand. The envelope, as was the practice, was inscribed simply '*Pour Christian*' and Kiffer explained to Bleicher that later in the day the agent named Christian would pass by, pick up the letter and take it on to Armand at his secret hiding-place. In fact, Christian did not come that afternoon but, after one setback and another lasting several days more, he was finally arrested, with Kiffer's aid, and was placed in the prison of Fresnes. But Christian, Bernard Krutki, the Polish officer who had served as A.D.C. to Armand at staff headquarters, was no collaborationist, and he was not easily terrorised by enemy threats. In long hours of interrogation inside the prison he steadfastly refused to reveal anything at all about either Armand or Inter-Allied. Finally, despairing of bullying, the Germans resorted to an ingenious trick. They sent Kiffer alone into Christian's cell in the guise of a fellow-prisoner, and it was to Kiffer, believing him still to be a loyal member of the organisation, that Christian at last confided the fateful figure and three words which the German *Abwehr* had been working untiringly for weeks past to obtain—'8, Rue Villa Léandre'. That was on Sunday night, November 16, the very evening of Armand's celebration party.

All the next day the Germans made their preparations for their arrest of Armand and finally, at dawn on the morning of November 18, after lorry-loads of Security Police had been thrown around the area, Bleicher and Borchers themselves knocked at the door of the quiet little house in the Rue Villa Léandre. "German police, open up!" they shouted as they pushed their way upstairs past the frightened Madame Blavette. And there, standing in elegant pyjamas in his studio room, they found Armand, a fearless and dignified figure, who told them simply, "I am a Polish officer named Roman Czarniawski—and I have been doing my duty." And in the bedroom adjoining

Armand's work-room, lying in bed, was the attractive figure of Renée Borni.

But Bleicher's dramatic swoop on the Villa Léandre that morning was not carried out with that smooth and complete efficiency which would have befitted an *Abwehr* operation. One of the fish got away, as I heard from Madame Blavette herself, when I called on her one Sunday afternoon long after the war.

"It was six o'clock in the morning when the Germans—about six of them—arrived outside this house," she related, "making a terrible noise. And they made a small mistake at first, for instead of ringing on my own front door they tried the door adjoining—its number is '8b' instead of '8'. This must have given the people upstairs at least a few moments' warning that the Germans were on their way.

"At any rate the radio operator on the top floor—I never knew his name—had time to make his escape. He tied two bedsheets together, lowered himself out of the window on to a nearby roof and made a dash across the roofs to an adjoining street quite a long way away from where the Germans had arrived. I believe that man was in fact never caught."

Madame Blavette herself was arrested by Bleicher that morning on the allegation, which she strenuously denied, that she had known about what had been going on in the upstairs rooms of her house. After spending four months of imprisonment in La Santé she was finally released and never saw or heard of The Cat or Armand again.

Anyway, while the quick-witted radio operator managed to escape, Armand himself was taken away for his first interrogation at the Hotel Edouard VII in the Avenue de l'Opera, the Paris headquarters of the *Abwehr*. But Renée Borni, staying behind, apparently poured out to the sympathetic Bleicher the whole story of the woman she hated most in the world, her rival Mathilde Carré,

"Everything," she told the Germans, "everything has been all her fault."

\* \* \*

It was from Mireille Lejeune that, many years later, I heard something of exactly what happened, on that morning of her arrest, to 'Micheline', as Madame Lejeune and many other members of Inter-Allied called Madame Carré.

The Cat had been due, at ten o'clock that cold and foggy Tuesday morning, to meet one of her agents named Michel at the little café adjoining the exit to the Metro station Lamarck. She drank a cup of coffee there and telephoned home to her mother and to Uncle Marco, with whom she was due to lunch, but Michel never turned up. After waiting the agreed period of a quarter of an hour, Madame Carré walked up the steep steps from the Metro station, across the broad Rue Caulaincourt and up to the Avenue Lamarck, where she wanted to go up to her room and change her fur coat. For she had the previous night accepted the hospitality of Mireille Lejeune and had slept in a room in that building.

When Madame Carré arrived at the Avenue Lamarck, Mireille gave her the news. "There's been a big action by the German police all along the Avenue Junot," she said. "I just heard about it at the milk shop. You'd better not stay around this area today; it may be dangerous for you."

"I must go up to the Rue Cortot," replied Madame Carré. "I've all sorts of papers and maps in my room there. I can't possibly let them be found. Don't worry about me, I'll be all right. But if by any chance I don't come back here later today, be sure to burn all the papers you find upstairs in my room."

"It's too dangerous," said Mireille again. "I wish you wouldn't go."

(And, "If only she'd listened to me that morning,"

said Mireille to me when I saw her, "so very many tragedies might have been avoided.")

But with characteristic self-assurance, Mathilde Carré, in her dark fur coat and little red hat, set off to climb the steps of the Rue des Saules which led to the Rue Cortot, her quick eyes looking everywhere about her as she went, like a jungle animal on guard against danger. And indeed there were signs to cause her disquiet. The Rue des Saules should have been virtually deserted at that hour on a cold November war-time morning. But, hanging about in the mist outside that old familiar cabaret the Lapin Agile, which stood on the corner of the Rue Cortot, were a number of men who, though to be sure they were dressed in civilian clothes, had a strange look about them of being more accustomed to wearing uniforms. The men seemed, without any doubt, to be waiting for someone.

With her heart beating slightly faster, Mathilde Carré refrained from turning into the Rue Cortot, but went on up the Rue des Saules on to the Place du Tertre, familiar peace-time rendezvous of so many tourists. She hung about looking in the shops, closed and deserted, glanced over her shoulder and saw that she still was being followed.

And what happened next was told by Madame Carré herself, in her evidence to the Examining Magistrate, M. Fougères, during the preparations for her trial, some years later.

To gain time, The Cat looked into the window of a print shop on the Place du Tertre.

"What are you doing up here so early in the morning?" said a Teutonic voice behind her.

Turning round Mathilde Carré saw a plain-clothes German policeman. And quickly she said, "I'm just looking around to find an etching to take as a present to somebody I'm having lunch with."

"Why don't you have lunch with me instead?" asked the stranger with a significant grin.

Quickly The Cat turned away and walked down the street again towards her own house in the Rue Cortot, though she could hear that the man was still following her. Suddenly, as she arrived outside the house, she was gripped by the arms on both sides by two Germans who appeared from behind a fence. "Come with us," they told her. "We have been waiting for you all the morning."

Roughly they bundled her into a waiting police van, which sped up the hill towards the Avenue Junot. And as she drove away Mathilde Carré heard the good Madame Alice crying after them, "Oh, don't hurt her, don't hurt her—she's done nothing wrong."

The car swept on to the corner of the Rue Villa Léandre. And standing there waiting for them, accompanied by a German who later turned out to be Bleicher, The Cat saw the figure of Renée Borni—and at that moment she knew that all was lost. Bleicher pulled open the door of the police car, pointed at Mathilde Carré and she heard Renée reply, "Yes, that's her, that's The Cat."

Mathilde Carré sat calmly and apparently quite self-possessed in the car as it drove her back into the centre of Paris. It may even have been that at this moment, as she had once done during that bombing raid in Northern France, she was actually exulting in the stimulation of physical danger, in the dramatic excitement of the moment in which at least she had the satisfaction of playing the principal role. Did she even then, perhaps, believe, as she had so often done before and was so often to do again, that the 'little cat' was too clever for any serious harm to come to her?

However that may be, The Cat, it appears, said nothing during that drive down to the *Abwehr* headquarters in the Hotel Edouard VII. She was still calm and reserved when a junior official took down the regulation details of her age, birthplace and so on, as a preliminary to booking her for detention in the women's prison of La Santé. And she

was calm, too, when she entered the prison, submitted to a personal search by a woman gaoler and saw pass into the possession of her captors the vital little diary in which (again, how recklessly!) she had dutifully noted all the times and dates of her coming meetings with her fellow-agents of Inter-Allied.

But it was when she actually saw her prison cell, dark and icily cold, that the spirit of The Cat appears finally to have revolted. Here was no prospect of sudden, stimulating excitement, but only of long days of anxious waiting, in uncertainty and intense discomfort, and of bitter brooding over the treachery of the miserable little girl whom Armand had preferred to herself. In a flash the conviction seems to have come over Mathilde Carré that, whatever she did and at whatever cost, she must not spend more than one night in this dreadful prison cell.

We have, indeed, an intimate revelation of what exactly was in the mind of The Cat at the particular moment, for in her memoirs she relates the story of her arrest and imprisonment. And in recalling that first night at La Santé prison she characteristically writes:

"I lay down on my bed fully dressed, even in my fur coat. I was so cold. I began to realise my situation; everything was finished, everything was destroyed. And where were the others? When I had thought about everybody else I even had a few thoughts left for myself. . . . So this was how my life was finishing—and I wanted to die, that would be a good thing. But I did not want to stay in prison, shut in, deprived of everything: it was an impossible thing that I should have to stay here."

And, many years later, she explained it all very simply to the court during her trial. Speaking of her first—and only—night in that prison, she told the judge, "Of course I realised that it was out of the question for me to stay in a place like that. Why, the water-closet smelled quite abominably."

## CHAPTER 6

# The Cat's New Face

SO The Cat, in her mind, was obviously half-way to 'collaboration' even before that first night of captivity was out. And the events of the following day were to clinch matters once and for all.

There was the early morning wakening in the cold and stinking cell, the miserable tin of prison coffee, the curt instruction—and nobody had ever before spoken in such a way to her, Mathilde Carré, the sister of a French officer—to clean out her room and stand to attention when she was spoken to. And always in her mind were those soul-destroying thoughts—the perfidy of Renée Borni, the ingratitude of Armand. Friends who saw her just before her arrest, moreover, said that at this moment The Cat was losing her confidence in the eventual outcome of the war. "*Ça va mal,*" she would sometimes confide to them, adding that she was beginning to wonder how the Allies could possibly emerge victorious. That, too, may have been a factor influencing her at this stage to throw in her lot with the Germans, that, and a plain and understandable fear of torture and death. But above all, it may well be, Mathilde Carré was simply driven on to act as she did by her own vaulting ambition—her determination to be supreme at all costs in some respect. If she had failed to excel as the greatest spy in all the Allied service, perhaps now she could excel in the destruction of all she had built up.

Everything which Mathilde Carré did had always been overdone—and now she was going to work for the Germans

with the same extravagant energy as that with which she had formerly worked for France.

Such at least seems to have been the mood in which The Cat arrived that morning of Wednesday November 19th at the *Abwehr* headquarters in the Hotel Edouard VII, to which she had been transported from La Santé prison.

Here again, from her memoirs we have available Mathilde Carré's own account of this incident:

"They took me up to a room at the top of the building and brought me an excellent breakfast: coffee, milk, butter, sugar and rolls; nothing was lacking."

Here, after the 'excellent breakfast', it was that The Cat had her first serious encounter with the redoubtable Bleicher. And, as Bleicher courteously proffered a box of cigarettes, he began that quiet but momentous chat with Madame Carré which finally clinched her resolve to become his ally. This is what he said, as related by Mathilde Carré herself:

"Madame," began Bleicher, "we have decided that you are too intelligent and interesting a person to remain in prison. You know everything. You can be a most valuable help to us in destroying Inter-Allied. Now that we have arrested Armand we have in our possession all the necessary documents, but we need you, who are known by everybody, in order to carry out the arrests. I see in your diary: Wednesday, November 19, 11 o'clock Café Pam Pam. Therefore in a short time you are due to meet an agent. I will accompany you as a member of your group and you will introduce me as such and when this agent has talked enough I will arrest him. We will work together, you and I, and if you make no trouble for me you can be sure that you will be free this evening. But if you deceive me, you will be executed immediately and without trial. Save your neck—and regain your liberty. Save your neck and understand that England is lost. What do you say they have been paying you? Six thousand francs a

month?" (At that time about £33.) "Ah, yes, the English always make other people work for them—and they don't even pay them properly."

Bleicher added his conviction that the outcome of the war with the Allies was already a foregone conclusion; the Germans were bound to win, and those who were foolish enough to work against them were doomed.

"Work with me loyally," urged Bleicher once more, "and you shall be free: but if you try any tricks with me, it will mean your immediate execution. Do we understand each other?"

Nobody will ever know whether, at this moment, The Cat had any misgivings of conscience. But if she had, then she disguised them well. Still under the impression that Sergeant Bleicher, the man who was interrogating her, was a high-ranking member of the *Wehrmacht* in civilian clothes, she replied simply, "I understand perfectly, *mon officier*." And Sergeant Bleicher was no doubt delighted equally by her agreement to his plan and by the flattering appellation which she bestowed upon him.

The Cat had taken her fateful decision.

So off in a staff car with a French number-plate driven by a soldier-chauffeur, also in plain clothes, Bleicher and Mathilde Carré went up the Champs Elysées, miserable and semi-deserted on that cold November morning, to that resort of thousands of pre-war tourists in search of a quick drink or a snack, the Café Pam Pam. They took a seat at a little table inside, and waited. After some minutes the door swung open and a man, looking suspiciously about him, entered and sat down at Mathilde Carré's table. The man was a M. Duvernoy and he was, in fact, not a member of the Inter-Allied network but an agent of the Deuxième Bureau of Vichy, with whom, it will be remembered, The Cat was also co-operating. Duvernoy looked questioningly at the man who sat at the side of Madame Carré. "Don't worry about him," she told him.

"He's a trusted friend." So Duvernoy, reassured, went on to talk quite openly of all the matters which were interesting the Deuxième Bureau and in which the co-operation of The Cat was sought. Now and then Bleicher interjected a tactful word or two, his brain, behind his glinting spectacles, registering every detail of the conversation.

Finally Bleicher rose to go. "I must be getting along," said he to Duvernoy. "Can I give you a lift in my car?"

Unsuspectingly Duvernoy accepted and the three of them climbed into the car which was waiting outside. It was not until the car was moving down the Champs Elysées towards the Place de la Concorde that Bleicher suddenly turned to his newly-found friend and announced to him, "Monsieur, you are now in a car of the German Police—and you are under arrest. I beg you not to make any painful scene."

White in the face, Duvernoy looked towards The Cat, sitting in the other corner of the car. Then he was handed over for interrogation by Bleicher's colleagues at the Hotel Edouard VII.

For Bleicher had many more tasks in store for The Cat that day. He had learned from Renée Borni that it was the habit of Mathilde Carré to telephone every day to her mother, who took messages for her regarding the day's appointments. And "that is the next thing we must do," said he.

So, from a call-box of the hotel, with Bleicher listening to every word on an extra ear-piece, Madame Carré telephoned to Madame Belard, who expressed joy and astonishment at hearing her daughter's voice, for she had learned of her arrest through Mireille Lejeune and had feared that she would never see her again. "Whatever happened to you?" cried her mother. "We were all so worried—and so was Uncle Marco when you never turned up to lunch with him. You must ring him up now and tell him you are all right."

"Yes, Maman," said Mathilde Carré, "I am all right. There's nothing to worry about."

And, "Uncle Marco," said Bleicher eagerly. "Who's Uncle Marco? You must ring him up right away."

Without protest—and, indeed, to be fair it is hard to see how protest would have availed her at this moment—Mathilde Carré put in a call to Uncle Marco, who also expressed his joy at hearing of her safety.

"I am meeting René Aubertin tonight at the Café Graff at six," he said. "You must come and join us and tell us all that has been happening to you."

"And this René," said Bleicher delightedly. "Oh yes, you shall introduce me to him, too."

Apart from Armand there were no two people in all the Inter-Allied organisation with whom Mathilde Carré had worked more closely than with Uncle Marco and René Aubertin, her old childhood friend, and no two who trusted her more implicitly. What were her feelings that day when she knew that, the very same evening, she was going to betray them both?

But there was other work to be done before that, for this was Bleicher's day of triumph and he obviously did not intend to let a moment of it go to waste. He already knew from Kiffer about the 'letter-box' at La Palette, so he announced happily to The Cat, "That is where we will go for lunch."

The café of La Palette is one of a group of brasseries around the junction of the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail—the Dome, the Coupole, the Select—which knew their days of glory in the gay twenties of the Paris of Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald. Red leather banquettes, marble-topped tables are among its attractions and oil paintings, done by former clients and still for sale, adorn the walls. One semi-circular wall is composed entirely of dusty mirrors, to give the illusion that the room is twice its actual size. In the middle of this

mirror wall is a mirrored door leading down to the telephones and toilets in the basement, and it was here that 'Madame Gaby', the elderly cloak-room attendant, presided, and acted as the recipient for letters exchanged between the members of Inter-Allied. Bleicher had, following Kiffer's denunciation, first arrested Madame Gaby but had then released her with instructions to return to her post and carry on as though nothing had happened. In this way, as he explained to Mathilde Carré, all the communications which passed between members of the network through the 'letter-box' of La Palette would henceforth fall into his hands.

Madame Gaby was there that morning and regarded Bleicher and The Cat with terrified and puzzled eyes as she saw them together. But there were no communications in the 'letter-box' that morning and the couple climbed the stairs through the mirrored doorway again and sat down to luncheon. Mathilde Carré can hardly have had great appetite as she sat there, surrounded by mirrors which reflected her sitting in her black fur coat, without make-up and with unkempt hair after her night in prison.

"And now to work," said Bleicher at last, as he pushed back his coffee cup and paid the bill. He announced to Mathilde Carré that his next arrest was going to be that of her friends Mireille Lejeune, of the Avenue Lamarck, and her handsome policeman husband whom the network knew as 'Boby Roland'. And off the couple drove again, up the steep hill that led to Montmartre.

It was Madame Lejeune who told me what happened that afternoon after The Cat had eaten her first meal with her new friend Bleicher.

"Micheline arrived at the house with a man quite early that afternoon," said Madame Lejeune. "I had no idea, of course, that he was a German, and she introduced him to me as a friend of hers. I just thought that Micheline had managed to get out of her trouble and was free again. We

talked together just as we had always done and I didn't suspect anything at all. Micheline asked me what I had done with her papers, and I told her that I had burned them as she had instructed me to do."

And then—was it, perhaps, just an outward sign of the great nervous tension which was inside Mathilde Carré—there was a sudden silly argument between the two women about Madame Carré's flowers. There had been a vase of flowers in her room on the day of her arrest and Mireille Lejeune had moved this down to her own apartment at the time she had collected The Cat's papers for destruction and her belongings for safe-keeping. "Why have you moved my flowers?" she asked Mireille indignantly. And the astonished Mireille replied, "Whatever are you talking about? You know you will find all your things are safe—and I'll see that you get more flowers than you ever had before."

Next, related Madame Lejeune, Mathilde Carré asked her for the money which had belonged to the Inter-Allied organisation. "I handed it all over to her. It was just at that moment that the man who was with her turned to me and said, 'You knew about everything that was going on. Now you must come along with us.' Even then I hardly realised what he was talking about. But when the man said, 'Where is your husband? You must get him at once,' I realised, of course, that he was a German.

"To gain time I said that I did not know where my husband was—did not know to which of the police posts in Paris he had been assigned that day. So they took me off in a car to make a tour of all the different posts where he might have been. The Cat was in the car with us too. She sat at one side, with Bleicher in the middle between us, and she never looked at me and she never said a word."

So the strange trio—two women who dared not speak to each other and Bleicher—toured Paris that afternoon looking for Boby Roland, the gallant 'Agent No. 2523' of

the French Police. As, at one post after another, they drew a blank, Madame Lejeune's hopes rose that perhaps her husband either had been, or could be, warned in time that the Germans were after him.

But such good fortune was not to be. At last, at the Police Commissariat in the Champs Elysées, in the shadow of the Petit Palais, they found Boby Roland, and the Lejeune couple were taken to the Hotel Edouard VII for their first interrogation. Mireille Lejeune never saw her husband again. She herself spent seven months in La Santé prison before finally being set free. But her husband stayed in Fresnes prison for more than two years before being deported to the horrors of Mathausen concentration camp. Even then there was hope that he might have lived to return to his wife, for he was still alive when the Americans liberated the camp at the end of the war. But before he could be repatriated, Boby Roland, starved and sick, caught typhus and died.

And the afternoon I talked to Madame Lejeune in a tiny apartment in the Avenue Lamarck and heard all this story, she said to me most sadly and gently, "I had such confidence in Micheline, and it seems strange even now that it should have been through her that I lost my husband. Of course, I could speak of her in hatred—but I don't want to do that. But I think that all the good which she did in life was washed out by the things she did which were bad."

## CHAPTER 7

# The Great Betrayal

NOW it was time for the meeting at the Café Graff, that ancient red-plush rendezvous of the Montmartre *boulevardier* just near the Moulin Rouge which has now, alas, been transformed into a 'snack café' to meet more modern needs and tastes. For years before the war the tourist attraction at Chez Graff was the great bar which slowly revolved, giving the casual drinker the impression that his cocktail must surely have been stronger than he had imagined. It was in the dark cover of this one-time gay resort that The Cat betrayed her two greatest personal friends, Marc Marchal (now no longer living) and René Aubertin, who later told me something of what happened on that fateful night.

Two German military cars and the civilian car of Bleicher had been drawn up out of sight in the nearby Rue Lepic. Bleicher instructed The Cat to go on in to the café alone, while he followed her upstairs into the bar and sat at a separate table, a little apart from her. Four men of the German Security Police in plain clothes were stationed to drink at the bar itself and be ready to intervene at the moment of the arrests.

Punctually at six 'Uncle Marco', with the high-domed forehead and lively, smiling eyes, arrived, threw up his arms and expressed his delight at seeing their little Cat safe and sound after all the rumours there had been of her arrest. René Aubertin came a few moments later.

Aubertin was astonished to see The Cat that evening because he had been told, positively, of her arrest. The

previous evening he had been due to spend the night in the Avenue Lamarck to make his weekly report for Armand. When he had got there, Boby Roland had warned him, "Don't stay here tonight. Micheline was arrested this morning in the Rue Cortot." Aubertin asked him, "Have the Germans searched the rooms here yet?" and the policeman replied that they had not. So Aubertin quickly went up to the room which was temporarily occupied by Madame Carré, took a suitcase and put into it all her books, letters, papers, photographs and, as he remembered, the plume of a St. Cyr cadet which had belonged to her brother. Aubertin went back to his own home with the suitcase and told his wife, "If I am not back with you at eight o'clock tonight, burn everything in this case."

When Uncle Marco had telephoned to him at his office during that afternoon, he had tried to warn him on the telephone that The Cat had been arrested. He said, "You know our friend is in trouble—she has a cold, has even had to be sent to hospital."

"It's not possible," said Uncle Marco. "I spoke to her myself on the telephone only this morning."

Nevertheless Aubertin had expected to see no one but Uncle Marco at the rendezvous at the Café Graff. So when he saw The Cat sitting at the table, his first words to her, as he later told me, were, "What are you doing here? I thought you were 'in hospital'?"

"Don't be angry," smiled The Cat. "I will explain everything to you."

So, with a faint feeling of suspicion, René Aubertin sat down at the table in the bar of Graff and ordered rose cocktails for all three of them. Uncle Marco opened the talk with the cheerful news that when he got home later he was due to join in the celebrations of the birthday of his daughter Elizabeth.

But let Aubertin himself take up the story for a moment: "As we sat there, I gradually began to realise that there

was something not quite normal about Micheline. I said, 'I certainly didn't expect to see you here,' and she replied, 'Ah, you know, Boby Roland didn't understand at all what was really happening. I'll tell you all the details later!'

"Then I saw that there were a number of people coming up towards us. I suddenly felt two revolvers in my back. The men spoke very quietly, so as not to disturb the other people in the restaurant, I suppose. '*Police Allemande*,' they said. 'Don't move or we shall shoot you.' I looked at Micheline and she looked to me quite green with emotion, positively livid. At that moment I really believed that she was being arrested along with the two of us.

"It's funny that one should remember such things, but I do remember that, with the revolvers still in my back, I called for the bill for the rose cocktails, paid the waiter—and drank all three cocktails myself.

"Micheline made no attempt at all even to save what might have been saved that evening. For instance, Marchal had with him a complete set of false identity cards hidden in a book on gardening which was on the table in front of us in the bar. When we all rose to go out he deliberately left the book lying there. But Micheline called to him, 'Uncle Marco, you have left your book on the table'—and of course the Germans looked at it and found all the false identity cards."

As the party left the café, Uncle Marco succeeded in quickly swallowing a compromising message which he had in his pocket.

So Uncle Marco and Aubertin were taken to the Edouard VII for a first quick questioning, and by eight o'clock that evening, just as the birthday party in Uncle Marco's home was due to start, just as Aubertin's wife was waiting for him for dinner, both men were being put into separate cells of Fresnes prison.

"Even then," said Aubertin, "we did not believe for a

moment that it was Micheline who had denounced us. We found that out only later in the prison, as one man after another came in and let us know that he had been arrested in her presence."

And what were the consequences, to the two best friends of The Cat, of her denunciation of them?

For Uncle Marco it meant six months of arrest and ceaseless questioning in Fresnes prison and deportation to Treves, where he was cruelly tortured and put for six months in irons in a solitary dark cell. In 1943 he was sentenced to death and transferred first to Buchenwald and then to Neuengamme where, because he was a scientist, the Germans offered him easy work inoculating fellow-prisoners with typhus for the purposes of experiments by the SS doctors. Uncle Marco refused to do this work—and because of his refusal he was sent off to Mathausen with a document ordering the guards there: 'This prisoner is to be destroyed on arrival.' But a miracle happened to save his life. He arrived at the camp so late at night that the regular SS guards were off duty and the non-commissioned officer in the guard room happened to be, like Marchal himself, a former member of a tank regiment. So, as a service to a fellow-soldier, the man destroyed the fatal document and Marchal's life was saved. Working in the hospital at Mathausen, Marchal saved hundreds of lives and in the end, a sick man, was repatriated through the services of the French Red Cross. He had the satisfaction of serving after the war as chief of the French section of the Inter-Allied commission in Berlin on the liquidation of the German war potential. But he died in 1950, largely as a result of overwork and the effects of his long wartime ordeal.

All those who knew Marchal say that he was one of the most notable members of the French Resistance, a man who never lost heart and whose spirit could not be broken

by either sickness or torture. On the day after his arrest in the Café Graff he caught a glimpse of Aubertin in an adjoining cell at Fresnes. Defying the orders of the guards, he called to him, "*Courage, mon vieux*, all will be well." And, ingeniously, for months of his imprisonment, he managed to smuggle out, in his laundry, encouraging messages full of hope to his wife and children. One of his messages from the torture prison of Treves told his children, 'Love each other and love and help your mother—and think of your duty before you think of your rights.' When he was transferred from Treves to Buchenwald, he travelled, chained to another prisoner, a twenty-year-old Frenchman, René Chavanne. It was Chavanne who afterwards related the incident which was wholly typical of 'Uncle Marco'. During the journey one of the German guards contemptuously threw down a half-smoked cigarette at the feet of Marchal. But Marchal just kicked the cigarette away. "Don't you smoke?" asked the German guard incredulously. "Oh I do, horribly much," replied Marchal coldly, "but I don't pick up cigarette ends—especially not from a German soldier." Wholly typical too was the reaction of the German guard. He promptly offered Marchal an unsmoked cigarette, took off his handcuffs—and requested him to bear witness in his favour if the war should end badly for the Germans.

And Aubertin, that other best friend of The Cat, had also desperate years to face. He spent eighteen months in Fresnes, a month in Romainville as a hostage waiting daily to be shot if the Germans had a sudden call for revenge, and then twenty-six months at Mathausen where he, too, escaped death by a miracle. For he developed a serious pleurisy of the lung—and he knew that anyone found by the SS guards 'guilty' of being an invalid was destined for the gas chamber. A Polish fellow-prisoner stole a medical syringe from the camp hospital and daily extracted the fluid from Aubertin's lung, so that he was

able to keep his illness secret from the prison guards until the time of his liberation. Aubertin, too, was an able Resistant and a very gallant man. When he got back from the war he found that he had lost not only his health but his wife and his home as well. With immense moral courage he set to work to build a new life for himself—and now once more is happily married again, with a prosperous business of his own, a well known figure in those international business circles which deal with oil and synthetic rubber.

There was one more family to whom The Cat had still to bring disaster before her first big day of betrayal was over.

At Bleicher's behest, up to Montmartre they rode once more to the home in the Avenue Lamarck of the Hugentoblers, where the concierge 'Noeud Richard' was acting as one of The Cat's most reliable 'letter-boxes'. Madame Hugentobler was just preparing dinner for the family as, holding Mathilde Carré by the arm, Bleicher pushed his way into the concierge's room. "German Police—you are arrested," he cried. Hugentobler, himself a dignified, disciplined figure, made no attempt at resistance. But when his wife realised that she was to be taken, too, she cried in protest that she could not leave alone her fourteen-year-old daughter and her baby of less than a year. She begged and beseeched Mathilde Carré to intercede on her behalf with the German—but Bleicher remained unmoved. "France will look after your baby," Bleicher told her curtly. Both the man and his wife were taken off on the inevitable journey, first to the Edouard VII for the records and then to their respective prisons. And as the weeping Madame Hugentobler was dragged out of her home, her former trusted friend 'Micheline' said only one word to her, "*Pardon*"—and turned away.

This double arrest was, perhaps, The Cat's cruellest

stroke of all. For later that night Madame Hugentobler, driven half crazy by her separation from her baby, who had no one left to care for it, hanged herself in her cell at La Santé prison.

For The Cat that evening there were experiences in store of a very different kind. Bleicher took her to dine at an expensive and luxurious restaurant. There were soft lights, comfortable chairs, freely-flowing champagne. It must, indeed, have been just the place to make Mathilde Carré forget the rigours of the previous night in that stinking cell of La Santé—and the embarrassments of that long day in which she had been forced to witness the destruction of so many of her friends.

After an excellent dinner, The Cat found herself once again in Bleicher's car, but driving not towards her room in the Rue Cortot as she had expected, in view of Bleicher's promise to set her free, but down long avenues towards the outskirts of Paris. For though The Cat appeared to have done a good day's work for Bleicher and to have resolved to keep faith with her new-found friends, the German sergeant was not intending to run any risks with her. He was taking her out with him to the headquarters of the St. Germain *Abwehr* at the Villa Harry Baur at Maisons Laffitte, where he and his colleagues could keep her under proper supervision.

And the rest of what happened that memorable night is told with great clarity and succinctness in a brief extract from the personal journal of The Cat. As she tells of that motor-car journey out to Maisons Laffitte, Mathilde Carré relates:

"But where are we going now?" I asked Bleicher.

"We are going to bed."

"But what about your promise?"

Then he began to talk very quickly, saying that I was free, absolutely free, but that for the sake of prudence they thought that it would be better not to leave me alone. The best thing would be that I should go and live with them.

I was not angry; I was more flabbergasted. And I did not realise what was really happening until Bleicher showed me up to my room . . . and then I found myself in the presence of the most disgusting sentimental beast—and I began to think with regret of my cell. . . .

But not, it would appear, with any excessive degree of regret. For by the very next evening, The Cat seemed to have accepted her new surroundings with a remarkable amount of resignation, if not of enthusiasm. To the German officers of the Villa Baur she quickly became their '*kleines Kätzchen*' and suddenly found herself being feted by the very men who so recently had been her sworn enemies. This is her pert account of her second evening as the 'toast of the *Abwehr*':

When I got back I went up to my room to go to bed. I was just going to sleep, it must have been around midnight. Bleicher came in and told me to get up and make myself beautiful. I did my hair, put on a pair of pyjamas and went down into the big hall. Bleicher was playing the piano (and one had to admit that he played remarkably well and even could improvise most tastefully). The Commandant came towards me and kissed my hand; behind him Borchers did the same and they introduced to me a little man who looked like a Levantine merchant, whom they called Lieutenant Kayser. The Commandant excused himself and went to bed. Borchers, Bleicher and Kayser took me by the arms and led me off to drink

champagne. All three looked at me with a great deal of admiration.

So, on the very first night of her visit, as was later revealed at her trial, Mathilde Carré, the patriotic Resistant of only thirty-six hours previously, became the apparently not-at-all-unwilling mistress of Sergeant Bleicher of the German *Abwehr*. The day of great betrayals was complete.

## CHAPTER 8

# “Lovely Day”

THE days which now immediately followed for The Cat, during her sojourn with the admiring German officers of the *Abwehr* headquarters at Maisons Laffitte bore a depressing resemblance to one another.

The pattern of most of them was the same: a night in the arms of Sergeant Bleicher, breakfast with the officers and then a busy day up in Paris assisting at the arrest of one after another of her former friends and colleagues. Were these days a period of intense mental strain for Mathilde Carré, and heartrending pangs of inner conscience? Or were they simply days of high excitement and sadistic stimulation? No one will ever know the answer to that. But if Mathilde Carré was in reality at this time a tortured soul keeping up an outward appearance of brazen-hearted bravado she certainly acted her role remarkably well. She flirted, laughed and drank with the German officers, went out with Bleicher daily to lunch and dine at good Paris restaurants and at no time seems to have shown any undue emotion as she watched her friends being carried away to imprisonment and, in many cases, torture and death.

She even, on the second day of her new life, took Bleicher (probably at his request) to lunch with her mother and father in the little flat in the Avenue des Gobelins.

It must have been an uncomfortable meal for all concerned for, according to subsequent testimony, Bleicher took the opportunity to deliver himself of a typical propa-

ganda lecture on the lines which had become very familiar to the citizens of occupied France by this time. The Belards had been an irreproachable and patriotic family; M. Belard had been wounded in the First World War. So it was no doubt with all that pseudo-manly frankness of 'one former front-fighter to another' that Sergeant Bleicher compared notes with M. Belard on their mutual experiences in the First World War and told him how he had been made a prisoner of the British and of how he had suffered under them. "But the French," Bleicher continued, "they are different altogether and we Germans know how to appreciate the true spirit and greatness of France. We are two great cultural nations and it is our duty to work together." And he added that it was for such a reason as this that he had been happy to be able to be of service to their charming daughter Mathilde despite the fact that she had made serious mistakes by indulging in espionage, mistakes which, if the Germans were not so charitable and understanding, would certainly have cost her her life. But he, Bleicher, would see that no harm came to her provided, of course, that both Madame Carré and her parents collaborated fully with him in his work of rounding up those misguided Resistance workers. Later Madame Belard told her daughter sadly: "You know that I would willingly go to prison in your place, if I had to. But I really would rather see you dead than working for those people." *OK*

Once the luncheon was ended, without more delay, there was another wave of arrests, carried out under the penetrating, enigmatic eyes of The Cat.

First Madame Carré and Bleicher went together, followed by a truckful of *Abwehr* men, to the tiny courtyard apartment in the Rue des Deux Ponts which was occupied by 'Rapide', M. Lach, the Pole who had been one of the pioneers of the organisation. Bleicher attached special importance to Lach because he believed that he would be

able to learn from him the address and details of the Polish organisation in Marseilles which he knew under its code name of ‘Tudor’. But Lach himself was a tough character and Bleicher decided to use prudence and stratagem in his arrest. So The Cat was first sent alone up the winding narrow stone steps to the humble third-floor apartment to knock on the door and call through it to Lach, “It’s only me, Micheline.” Lach and his wife were just beginning their lunch and they opened the door and greeted Madame Carré with smiles. She stood there in the doorway, keeping the front door open, and began to talk to Lach.

“Listen, Rapide,” said The Cat, “things are not going too well with Armand. I’ve got to send a warning straight away to headquarters in Marseilles that we’re in trouble. I need the address of Tudor at once.”

Something in the manner of Mathilde Carré at this moment aroused the suspicions of Lach. He told her, “But you know the address of Tudor, surely? I thought you had been there yourself?”

“No, I don’t know it,” The Cat repeated. “Come on, give it to me quickly.”

“I don’t know it myself,” said Lach firmly. And, after exchanging some further remarks, Madame Carré turned away and started to go down the steep stone stairs again.

Just as she was doing so, Bleicher, brandishing a revolver in each hand and followed by another German, came rushing up the stairs. He pretended not to know Madame Carré and called out, “Who are you, coming out of that apartment? You must be accomplices. Get inside and put your hands up.”

Lach, his wife and The Cat were all pushed roughly inside the little apartment, while the Germans began a methodical search.

Madame Carré had told Bleicher that Lach had two

revolvers and some strychnine hidden in the flat and the Germans promptly discovered them. "If only she had not done that," Lach subsequently related, "we might even then have had a chance of escape. I could have shot the two Germans and we could have got away into the unoccupied zone."

"Get dressed," commanded Bleicher to Madame Lach. "We are all going together. But don't worry. It's nothing serious. Just an enquiry into black market operations. We will only keep you and your husband a few minutes."

Still under the menace of Bleicher's revolvers, the trio—Lach, his wife and The Cat—went down the stairs and out to a car waiting for them in the street. Bleicher and the other German sat in front, with the other three sitting behind, with Madame Carré in the middle. As the car drove off, Lach said to her bitterly, "That's nice work you have done to-day." The Cat said no word in reply, and slowly it dawned upon Lach with horror that it was The Cat herself who had betrayed him. His suspicions were confirmed when the party arrived at the Hotel Edouard VII and he and his wife were hustled up to the interrogation room. Madame Carré with nonchalance strolled at liberty along the corridor, smoking a cigarette.

The Cat and Rapide never met again. Madame Lach was released after thirteen months in prison; but Lach himself, after being beaten and tortured by his German interrogators, and spending months in solitary confinement, was finally sent to Mathausen concentration camp. There, on May 5, 1945, he was liberated by the American army. After years of sickness and unemployment, he was finally aided by an old friend of Inter-Allied, the Pole Stephane, and to-day Lach works as the foreman of a weaving works for women's lingerie in Paris. And he and his wife still occupy the little apartment in the Rue des Deux Ponts which was the scene of another of The Cat's betrayals.

Three more of the important Poles of the Inter-Allied organisation were arrested almost simultaneously. Up from Marseilles to the Villa Léandre, now occupied by plain-clothes *Abwehr* men, came, all unsuspecting, Stephane, on his regular mission as one of the organisation's couriers. He rang at the door, stepped inside—and found himself under arrest. But The Cat played no direct part in this. Stephane himself, like Lach, survived Mathausen and returned after the war to Paris, where he now runs a flourishing clothes business of his own and is happily married to a beautiful Frenchwoman.

More dramatic were the arrests of 'Paul' and 'Observer'.

Bleicher had found in Mathilde Carré's handbag a note which had been sent to her by Paul, the slim, slight Polish aristocrat, de Rocquigny, who cherished such a deep personal affection for The Cat. So off Bleicher went with Mathilde Carré to the quiet family pension near the Boulevard St. Michel in which Paul lived, and The Cat played all over again the role which was by now becoming so familiar to her. Paul opened the door of his room to her. "My dear Micheline," he exclaimed, "what a pleasure to see you, please come in." And into the room rushed Bleicher and his team and closed the door behind them while they briefly interrogated Paul, above whose tiny figure they seemed to tower like giants.

While Paul was being 'grilled', The Cat remained outside in the corridor, and she was still there when he was led out, a small and frightened figure, by the German plain-clothes men. But, so it was afterwards related, Paul uttered not a word of reproach to the woman whom he had admired nearly to the point of love and who he now knew had betrayed him. As he passed the watching, silent figure of The Cat in the corridor he only smiled faintly to her and remarked, "Isn't it a lovely day?"

Paul's fate was even more tragic than that of most of

the other Poles. After being put through long hours of 'interrogation' in Paris he was sent to Mathausen, where his small size and weak appearance made him the immediate target for the SS bullies of the camp. It was one of Paul's companions in Mathausen, the courier Stephane, who told me how he died. Only a few days after his arrival in the camp, Paul was stopped by one of the SS guards, who questioned him. "You there, tell me, what did you like to do best before the war?" Paul unsuspectingly replied that in his days as a lecturer at Warsaw University he had sometimes liked to play the piano. "Good with your hands, are you?" shouted the SS man. "Then you can get out and use your hands in the quarry."

"I saw Paul not far from me that day," said Stephane, "being forced to lift stones which were far too heavy for such a small man, while all the time the guards whipped and kicked him. Finally, there was one big stone which he completely failed to move no matter how hard he struggled with it—and he was literally beaten to death."

The arrest of Paul had given Bleicher particular satisfaction, for he had obtained in Paul's apartment the address of another of his compatriots, the designer Wladimir Lipsky, known to the group as 'Observator'. So Bleicher happily announced, "Next we will get Observator."

Lipsky lived with his daughter Cipinka in a great over-crowded studio apartment on a hill leading up to Montmartre, not far from the Cirque Médran. It was in this studio, years afterwards, that he told me how his own association with The Cat had both begun—and ended.

"It was de Rocquigny—a man I was very fond of—who first put me in touch with Armand and his organisation, early in the winter of 1940," said Lipsky reminiscently. "I was only too glad to work for Inter-Allied, because I

had already done some intelligence work with the British army in the First World War and, moreover, the Germans had shot my wife in Poland after the invasion. So I agreed at once to do whatever Armand asked me for. But I avoided as much as I could having any contact with Madame Carré because, oddly enough, I didn't really ever trust her—though I seem to have been the only one who ever had any misgivings about her. But it always seemed to me that she was a bit bizarre, a bit too inquisitive, wanted to know too much about too many people.

“But anyway it was The Cat who came up to this studio on that day—November 23—on which I was arrested. She knocked at the door and called out, ‘Let me in, I need to see you.’ I opened the door to her and there she was with the man—Bleicher as it turned out to be—standing by her side. I looked out of the window and saw that the whole courtyard down below was full of German Police. The Cat said to me, ‘I've come for the documents which you have made ready for Armand.’ I realised something was wrong, so I said to her, ‘What documents? You must be making a mistake, I don't even know who you are.’ But that wasn't any good, of course, and I was taken away by the Germans, and so was my daughter Cipinka, and a Polish girl friend of hers named Wanda.”

Both Lipsky and his daughter were held by Bleicher's men and while Lipsky was being interrogated at Fresnes all his teeth were broken. Later the two of them were sent to Mathausen. “It was hard for my daughter, of course,” said Lipsky, without any special bitterness, “because until that time she had never ever seen a dead body.”

I asked Lipsky what had been his personal impression of Bleicher. “Oh, he was intelligent, of course,” said Lipsky, “but he did make some very silly mistakes. For instance, they questioned me at great length about a typewritten report I had made for Armand on German tanks, and which The Cat had given them. I denied, of

course, that I had ever made any such report. 'Why,' I told them, 'I don't even know how to use a typewriter.'

"Let's see if that's true," said the Germans. And they put me down in front of a machine in their office and told me to try and copy that document. It was only a few moments before they could see for themselves that I really couldn't type, and I heard them say together, '*Nein, er hat das nicht geschrieben.*' But the truth never seemed to have occurred to them; in fact, I had dictated the document to a woman secretary who worked for me—and I'm glad to say they never got on to her all through the war. In fact there were nine people who worked with me who were never betrayed."

And Lipsky, now an invalid, though still able to earn a modest living by doing translations, looked around his crowded, velvet-hung studio, packed with relics of the past. "The Cat?" he said. "No, I never saw her again except in court during her trial. A very strange woman indeed. She gave herself up completely to whoever she was working with at any particular time. She did perfect service for the Allied cause at the beginning, then equally perfect service for Vichy, for the Germans and perhaps—who knows?—even for the British again after she went to London. Oh yes, Monsieur, a very strange woman indeed."

So the arrests and betrayals of The Cat continued, all following much the same pattern. Each arrest provided the clues for new enquiries, mounting daily in number, so that they became far too numerous to describe in detail. There were the same smiling visits from The Cat, preceding the appearance of Bleicher and his cohorts armed with revolvers and tommy-guns, the same routine of interrogation—and final despatch to prison and concentration camp.

Only one of the major enterprises of Bleicher and The

Cat at this period seems to have gone awry, thanks to some quick-thinking and co-operation between members of the French Police. This is a story to be found in French official records.

After the arrest of ‘Boby Roland’, the Brigadier of Police, Charles Lejeune, Bleicher came into possession of a number of clues indicating that other members of the Paris Police Force were also acting as enterprising members of the French Resistance, in particular some colleagues of Lejeune attached to the Commissariat of the eighteenth *arrondissement*. So off to the Commissariat went Bleicher one day, taking with him one of his henchmen of the ~~Absch~~ whose hefty Teutonic appearance and ill-fitting civilian clothes apparently made him instantly recognisable as a German police official. The pair went straight into the office not of the Commissariat but of the adjoining Mairie and announced their presence with dignity. “German Police,” they said, adding that they were seeking an immediate interview with the Police Commissioner of the *arrondissement*. The official in charge received them with every courtesy and bade them wait a moment while he fetched the Commissioner.

But it took less than a moment for the news of the arrival of the two German officials to spread like jungle magic around that building. The French Police knew perfectly well by this time about the arrest of Brigadier Lejeune and the proceedings in the Villa Léandre. So there was ample time for a warning to be given to those members of the police of the eighteenth *arrondissement* who might be in any danger, and for those gallant officers to fade silently away. So after the Chief Commissioner had appeared before Bleicher, and Bleicher had handed him the list of policemen whom he desired urgently to interview, and the Commissioner had gone off to see if he could round up the men, it was with deep regret that the Germans were finally informed that not one of the men in question appeared to

be on duty at the Commissariat on that particular day. But, the Commissioner politely assured the two Germans, every effort would at once be made to trace them and, as soon as the wanted men were located the *Abwehr* would be duly informed.

A few days later a still polite and very apologetic Commissioner of Police appeared in person at the *Abwehr* headquarters in the Hotel Edouard VII. He was positively desolated to have to report that not one of the missing men had so far turned up, (but the Germans could rest assured: a ceaseless watch would be maintained for them, since everyone must agree that such reprehensible enemies of the *Wehrmacht* could not be allowed to remain at large. And that was the last that Bleicher ever heard of the affair of the missing policemen.

But a more pressing matter had now to be pursued. The Cat had told Bleicher that, on the 24th of every month, all the agents of Inter-Allied who were able to do so had an arrangement to meet at an agreed rendezvous—the Café La Palette. Here they would expect to see The Cat and, it was agreed among the Germans of the Villa Harry Baur, The Cat must not disappoint them. This was an occasion on which, Bleicher hoped, many of the remaining fish would be swept into the *Abwehr* net.

So on that afternoon, The Cat was installed at a prominent table in the mirrored salon of La Palette, a conspicuous figure in her fur coat and bright red hat. Bleicher's men in plain clothes were placed around the café's various tables, mingling with the clients, and some of them took their girl friends along to make the whole scene look more convincing. Down in the basement Madame Gaby, still shaken and timid after her arrest and subsequent release, was instructed to keep on with her knitting as though nothing unusual was happening. And outside, hidden round the corner, were the trucks of the

*Abwehr* ready to carry away the members of Inter-Allied as soon as they should have revealed themselves.

Even for The Cat it must have been a moment of some tension as she sat on the café’s red-plush seat, the bait in the trap so hopefully set by Bleicher. Who, of all those still at liberty, would be unlucky enough to turn up that day? Some at least she knew would not be there—Kiki, the head of ‘Sector D’, Kiki who, like her, had already thrown in his lot with the Germans. He would not appear, nor would her little friend Paul nor many others.

So, all through that lunch-time session at La Palette The Cat sat there, toying with food and drink, and wondering who would arrive. But that day fortune seemed to be on the side of the Inter-Allied agents. In the upshot only one of them, a small man nicknamed ‘Coco’, heavily disguised in dark glasses, sidled up to Mathilde Carré’s table and whispered, “It’s me. How glad I am to see you here again.” He went on down through the mirrored door to seek a message from the ‘letter-box’ of Madame Gaby—and walked into the arms of a German *Abwehr* man waiting there below for him. But it seems that many other Inter-Allied agents must have got wind of what was happening, for Coco was the only person captured in the trap at La Palette that day. As they dined together comfortably again that evening, Bleicher no doubt expressed to The Cat his disappointment at the work of that particular afternoon.

A few days later there came an even stranger development in the drama of The Cat. Lunching with Bleicher, Mathilde Carré was somewhat mystified to learn that he and she were to move out of the Villa Harry Baur and into different quarters.

“We have found a most attractive new home for you,” said Bleicher ingratiatingly. “We are going to christen it ‘The Cattery’.”

## CHAPTER 9

# The Cattery

TWO reasons lay behind the decision of Borchers and Bleicher to set up 'The Cattery', to install themselves and Mathilde Carré in a separate establishment of their own, independent from the *Abwehr* headquarters in the Villa Baur.

One reason was that the very success of the action against Inter-Allied had resulted in the Germans suddenly being overwhelmed with work, so that they had an urgent need for extra staff—and extra space. Armand's meticulous assembly of intelligence documents, of copies of every message exchanged with London, of maps, sketches and reports, had provided the *Abwehr* with a pile of material which had to be examined with care and in secrecy. And, as one new agent after another fell into the traps set for them by The Cat, the prisons of Fresnes and La Santé were filling up with ever more victims awaiting interrogation. Within a few weeks of the beginning of The Cat's co-operation with Bleicher, there were not far short of a hundred former members of Inter-Allied, from both Paris and the provinces, under arrest.

But the main reason for the move was the new plan drawn up by Borchers and Bleicher for the secret 'radio war' with London which was to be carried on with the aid of Mathilde Carré. This plan was decided on at a top-secret conference in the Hotel Edouard VII. For the first time in the Second World War, an Allied radio transmitter was to be 'turned round' and used for the benefit of the Germans. This radio trick was to be played many times

again later in the war—and by both sides—but it was the Inter-Allied radio which was the first to be used by the enemy to mislead the British War Office and its Allied Intelligence services.

So it was with high excitement and delight that the move was made to a small but attractive timbered 'Normandy-style' villa in a secluded spot, standing in its own garden in the lower part of St. Germain. The villa, of which the real name was 'The Little Priory', was well warmed with central heating, had two working rooms on the ground floor—one of them with a bar in one corner—three bedrooms and a modern bathroom on the first floor, and above that an attic for the convenient installation of Armand's wireless set, which was moved thither from the Villa Léandre. It had been commandeered by the Germans from a French banker and his wife.

It was a strange ménage which now moved into The Cattery. There were Bleicher and The Cat, who happily shared one of the double bedrooms on the first floor; there were Borchers, Kayser and one or two other German officers concerned in the affair of Inter-Allied. There was also Renée Borni, Armand's mistress, who was taken by the Germans to carry on the work which she had done before, that of putting the messages into cipher. Renée and Mathilde Carré were still not on speaking terms, and the hatred between the two women was so intense that at times the Germans had to order Renée to remain in her room whenever The Cat was around.

There were obviously urgent problems to be settled by the Germans before the radio could be set working with London, if the suspicions of the British were not to be aroused.

In the first place the efficient radio operator who had been working the set at the time of the raid on the Villa Léandre, had never been seen again since his escape that morning through the upstairs window. This fact posed a

double problem for the Germans: first there was the danger that the operator might have succeeded in warning London of Armand's arrest. But Borchers and Bleicher decided, justifiably as it turned out, that this possibility was not a fatal handicap to their plan. For this man knew only of the arrest of Armand and Renée Borni, not that the rest of the organisation had also been rounded up. And every other member of Inter-Allied who knew about the disaster to the rest of the organisation was now in the power of the Germans, either in prison or, like The Cat and Renée Borni, collaborating personally with the *Abwehr*.

The second difficulty raised by the operator's escape was that a new operator had to be found before Armand's set could be put into action. This was not such a simple matter as it might seem. For, it appears, every Morse operator has his own personal touch on the transmitter which, to an expert listener, seems as individual and easily recognisable as a concert pianist's touch on the keyboard.

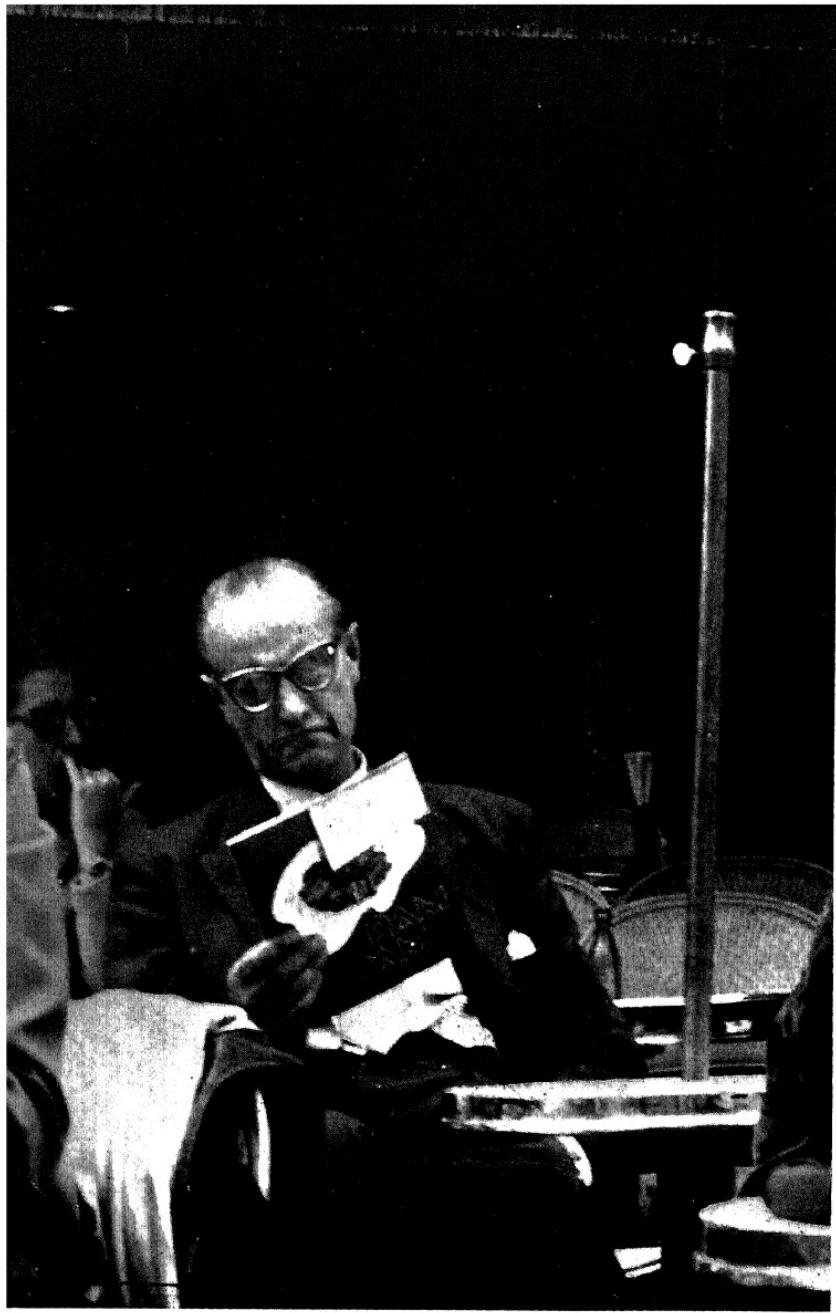
Therefore, if some completely unfamiliar hand were used in transmitting messages to London—a hand which London had never heard before—it would be tantamount to putting the British on their guard from the beginning.

But an early solution was found for this latter problem. Bleicher had learned from The Cat that, in the earlier days of Inter-Allied, Armand had used a radio operator nicknamed 'Marcel' who had finally become dissatisfied with the work and had quit the service of the organisation. So, with the Cat's aid, Marcel was traced, arrested and he agreed to set his hand once again to the key.

All seemed now to be set for the great moment when direct contact would be opened up between the little group of *Abwehr* men in the villa at St. Germain and the British War Office in London. But one further problem remained: the danger that one of the three people being used by the Germans as vital pawns in this radio game—



"The Cattery", St. Germain—a very ordinary house. It had a secret radio transmitter in the attic



Hugo Bleicher on a post-war visit to Paris, sitting outside  
the Café Pam Pam—scene of The Cat's first denunciation

The Cat, Renée Borni or Marcel—would in some way trick their new masters and contrive to send over the radio some form of warning indication which would put the receivers in London on their guard. Did The Cat at one time perhaps have some slight idea of doing this? Did she, in co-operating in the 'radio war' on London, see a chance of tricking her own new masters? Perhaps—and perhaps not. In any case Borchers and Bleicher were obviously far too intelligent to take any risks of such a thing happening. To guard against a warning phrase being inconspicuously inserted by Mathilde Carré in the messages she drafted, the text of everything she wrote was meticulously changed around before it was handed to Renée for coding.

Next the group of conspirators had to make up the details of the exact story which was to be told to London in order to explain the temporary break in transmissions which had occurred during the period of the arrest of Armand and the others. This was something to test The Cat's love of trickery and intrigue to the full, and she surely must have co-operated with enthusiasm in the composition of the first message of the new transmissions to London, which was obviously going to be of vital importance.

Finally it was agreed that the story to be told to London was this: that Armand and 'Violette' (Renée Borni) had been arrested, but that The Cat and one radio operator had escaped, and that she, The Cat, would carry on the Inter-Allied service as before. This idea was no doubt doubly acceptable to Mathilde Carré, for it would not only sound plausible to London, but it would also satisfy her self-esteem to imagine the British regarding her as a heroic little woman, bravely carrying on her loyal service in the face of grave danger. One other matter did not escape her subtle mind: she pointed out to the Germans that if the story they were telling London had actually

been true, and if she was really carrying on the Inter-Allied service single-handed, she would certainly, for security reasons, do so under another adopted name. Therefore she urged that her messages henceforth should no longer be signed 'The Cat' but with an alternative code-name. And, no doubt with much good-natured jesting, the Germans agreed with Mathilde Carré that she henceforth should be known to the British under the optimistic name of 'Victoire'.

The transmissions of Inter-Allied to London had always been sent at certain fixed times of day, varying on different dates, according to a precise schedule previously agreed. The documents found in the Villa Léandre would have included, of course, full details of this schedule, so that it was easy for the first of the new transmissions to begin at the correct moment one evening.

And so it was with an atmosphere of high expectancy that the little group of Borchers, Bleicher, The Cat, Kayser, Renée Borni and the rest stood around in silence as Marcel, his set warmed up, began gently tapping out the three letters which were the call-sign of Inter-Allied, and followed them with the first fateful message.

Was London receiving? Would London reply?

There must have been some agonising moments of suspense for Borchers and Bleicher after the transmission of that first message was finished and before there came back the signal from London indicating 'Message received'.

Thus began, in late November 1941, the regular daily exchanges of messages between the War Office and The Cattery, which were to continue until early the following year. There seems little doubt that, at least in the early days, London was completely deceived into believing that The Cat was, as she claimed, continuing her former Resistance work. One indication of this was that during the period of preparation for the British raid on the dock-yard of St. Nazaire, London sent a special request to

The Cat asking for her help in compiling details of St. Nazaire's defence installations. This message, as will be related later, must have seriously contributed to warning the Germans that the British were contemplating an action there.

However that may be, what is certain is that the radio messages kept flowing between The Cattery and London, to such an extent, indeed, that at times the Germans were somewhat at a loss to know what information to send to London next. So when the always ingenious Cat suggested "Why not ask them for money?" the idea must certainly have been greeted with enthusiasm. And duly a message went to the War Office to the effect that Madame 'Victoire' was running short of funds to pay her 'agents'—and would they please do something about it quickly?

This ruse worked, too. It was subsequently stated in the evidence provided for the courts that, in response to The Cat's appeal, there eventually came back a message from London saying that if 'Victoire' would call on the concierge of a certain house in the Boulevard Malesherbes, near the Madeleine, she would find what she desired. Up to Paris drove Bleicher and The Cat and sure enough, to their delight, in the room of the concierge in question, they found ready waiting for them an envelope containing the respectable sum of fifty thousand francs, about £283 at that period.

And so the daily life went on at The Cattery, with Kayser, the former lawyer from Mannheim whom The Cat thought looked like a Levantine salesman, occupying himself with the composition of the messages for London, Bleicher working methodically through the papers of Armand and the records of the interrogations of his prisoners, and Borchers, the hearty hard-drinking journalist from the Rhineland, being, to judge by the picture of him given by The Cat, increasingly tempted to look on the good French wines when they were red.

Borchers, indeed, was the leading figure of one highly unconventional episode which is related by The Cat herself in her memoirs. She tells how, one evening at The Cattery, two of the German officers were working on their papers while Borchers was mulling over a glass of cognac in a comfortable armchair. Bleicher had gone away from St. Germain on a short period of leave and Borchers took the opportunity to make a delicate proposal to The Cat.

"Tonight," said he (according to Madame Carré's version of events), "let's have a honeymoon together like two old military comrades." And later that evening he took The Cat out to dinner at the station restaurant of St. Germain—a good dinner, with apéritifs, wine, cognacs—and more cognacs. The Cat's narrative continues:

On leaving the restaurant, Borchers saw light filtering out from a nearby café. In he went, drank champagne with two officers whom he found there, then stood rounds for two non-commissioned officers, for two civilians, for the proprietress of the café and the waiter. The hour of curfew had sounded long previously. Borchers was angry, and forbade the café to close. "You know who I am?" he asked all and sundry and gave his rank and full name. And he added loudly, "And this is The Cat, the greatest ever international spy"—and there were loud hurrahs and more champagne. Finally, Borchers ordered three bottles to take back to drink at The Cattery, where he at last arrived, supported on the arms of two N.C.O.'s. At the villa he continued to drink, then he sent the N.C.O.'s to bed in unoccupied rooms, drew himself a cold bath, went to sleep in it—and narrowly escaped death from drowning while acting as "the human submarine in the bath," as he described it afterwards. Next morning he missed an eleven o'clock meeting

with his colonel and received a sharp remonstrance from his superior officer.

Indeed it would seem to have been a serious breach of military 'security' to have revealed in this way to the outside world the highly secret activities of The Cattery.

It is Mathilde Carré too, who in her memoirs paints this picture of the touching scene which took place at The Cattery one evening while the Germans were sitting round after dinner chatting to her in a characteristically German style of heavy-handed humour.

Madame Carré had that evening, it appears, been what she herself terms a '*chat méchant*'—a naughty cat—had shown some form of ill-humour, and the Germans were reminding her teasingly of her indebtedness to the mercy they had shown her. "And what would you do if we were to decide to shoot you?" asked Borchers, with a grin. "What would be your last wish?"

Quite unperturbed The Cat replied pertly: "To have a good dinner, to spend the night in bed with a friend, and then hear the 'Requiem' of Mozart. And while it was being played you could shoot me."

And with quiet self-satisfaction Mathilde Carré adds, "But they told me 'A woman like you ought not to die.' And all three of them were of the opinion that I ought to live for a whole variety of reasons, concerning both work and personal charm."

The old army pastime of 'scrounging' seems to have been singularly well established at The Cattery, for some of the officers there were not at all above profiting from the arrest of one or another member of Inter-Allied to add to the villa's stores of the amenities of life.

After the arrest of one important agent (still according to Madame Carré), two members of The Cattery went to his office and found there a whole caseful of provisions, sugar, tea, pre-war coffee and chocolate, cognac and

cheese. All these were happily carted back for the general enjoyment of those at the villa. On another occasion, after the arrest of an agent named 'Emile', one of the *Abwehr* men went to his flat and told The Cat in a disappointed voice, "Some pigs have been here before us and have taken everything worth having." So they had to content themselves with a few assorted items such as an electric iron and a good blue winter overcoat. And during a search of one of Armand's hide-outs, according to The Cat, Bleicher was disappointed to find that Armand's suits were too small for him—but was happy to be able to take a good selection of his neckties.

As a variation of discussing the radio messages to be sent to London, Bleicher spent part of the time at The Cattery reviewing with Mathilde Carré the possibility of arresting any further outstanding members of Inter-Allied that still remained at liberty. One of them, nicknamed 'Yole', gave him special concern. For the name of Yole masked the identity of a prominent French business man who had always been regarded by the Germans as a perfectly reliable collaborator with their economic services installed at the Hotel Majestic.

Renée Borni had, it appears, told Bleicher of the existence of the mysterious Yole and had added that nobody except The Cat knew this man's identity. So, down to the sitting-room went Bleicher for a serious talk with Madame Carré. Who was this Yole? Why had he not already been arrested? Where was the proof that he, this man whose collaboration had been so highly valued by the Germans, was in reality acting as a spy for the Allies? How could he, Bleicher, be sure that, on this occasion, his '*kleines Kätzchen*' was not trying to trick him by throwing unjust accusations upon a Frenchman who was a loyal ally of the Reich?

Eventually Borchers and Bleicher thought out an ingenious plan to use The Cat for obtaining positive

evidence against the man, if he were guilty. "You will go and see Yole," they told Mathilde Carré, "and tell him the same story that we have told London—that Armand has been arrested but that you are carrying on his work. You will have your right hand bandaged and say that you have burned it or something, so that you are no longer able to write with it. Then you will ask Yole to write down some information for you, bring back the paper to us—and we shall have the proof that he was working for Inter-Allied."

And this, in fact, is what was done. Mathilde Carré relates:

As had been agreed by telephone with Yole, I went to see him in his office one morning at eleven o'clock, with my big bandage on my right hand. He received me in as friendly a way as always and even offered me a present of a kilo of tea. . . . He had important tidings for me—and since I was a poor invalid, and so that I would not forget them, he would write them down for me himself. And in fact he did write them down on a little piece of yellow paper, explaining to me that the information was about the two most recent transports of rubber to Casablanca and Bordeaux, via South America, about a German transport which was at that moment loading at Diego-Suarez, and the date of its departure.

At the corner of the street outside the office, Bleicher was waiting for me. "That took a long time," he said, "where's the paper?" I gave him the paper, which constituted an irrefutable proof against Yole.

They went off to do their work (presumably to arrest Yole) and I went off to the Café Weber to wait for them. I could just hear them saying "*Police Allemande*" as they went into Yole's office, and could just imagine the scene. Well, Yole had given them

proofs of an excellent collaboration. He had played with both sides and that was too much. Now he was finished.

And, thus reflecting with apparent satisfaction on her betrayal of Yole, Mathilde Carré no doubt settled down to enjoy the best that the Café Weber could offer in the way of a cup of *ersatz* coffee, until Bleicher should be able to rejoin her.

It may be supposed that not all the radio messages sent to London from the transmitter in the attic of The Cattery were composed by, or even known to, Mathilde Carré. The Germans were able to put her code name of 'Victoire' to any message which they might consider it useful to send.

Therefore it will probably never be known for certain whether it was at The Cat's inspiration or at the demand of some other service of German Intelligence which specialised in schemes to mislead the enemy that towards the end of January 1942 there went out from The Cattery a brief message in Morse which was destined, only a short time later, to have repercussions on the front pages of newspapers all over the world.

Like all the other messages sent from The Cattery, this one, too, began 'Victoire reports . . .'. And when it was received in London it was presumably marked for the very urgent attention of British Naval Intelligence. For this message appeared to contain some vital information about a no less important subject than the two famous German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*.

But this is an episode which merits recounting in some detail.

## CHAPTER 10

### The *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*

ALL through the winter of 1941 the activities on board three German warships sheltering at Brest had caused the British Admiralty considerable concern. The battleships *Scharnhorst* (26,000 tons) and her sister ship the *Gneisenau* arrived there in March; the cruiser *Prinz Eugen* (10,000 tons), in June 1941. The war at sea had entered upon a critical phase. The Royal Navy had all its work cut out to safeguard convoys from enemy raiders, and these three warships had previously been engaged in effective attacks on shipping. If now the two battleships and the heavy cruiser were able to rejoin the German navy and were still more effectively employed with other capital ships, they might cause considerable damage. At that moment, however, they appeared to be safely ensconced in the naval base of Brest, situated in a deep inlet on the west coast of Brittany facing the Atlantic.

The Home Fleet could not be spared for the watch on Brest. The Admiralty considered that keeping battleships in these narrow waters would expose them to air attacks similar to those to which the German warships were subjected at Brest and to the risks of mine fields as well. The Admiralty urged the need for persistent air attacks on Brest, and these were carried out by Bomber Command. But repeated bombing attacks had failed to put the warships permanently out of action.

At the beginning of 1942 Hitler decided to get them back into the North Sea. Better to run risks than to allow the three ships simply to perish slowly at Brest under

continued British attacks. So the Germans evolved the hazardous plan of leaving Brest after dark and passing through the straits in daylight, counting on being able to get the warships through the Channel before the British had time to attack. But for such a daring enterprise as this the element of surprise would of course be an overwhelmingly important factor.

This was where The Cat came in. Throughout the autumn and winter of 1941 and the early part of 1942 the British had done everything in their power to obtain from their agents in France all possible information about the progress of the repair work which was being done on the German warships. In Brest itself one of the most famous men of the French Resistance, Gilbert Renault-Roulier, who worked under the name of 'Colonel Rémy', had organised a constant watch on the three warships and was reporting back regularly to Britain about what was going on.

In his book *On m'appelait Rémy* M. Renault-Roulier has given a detailed account of the warnings which were sent to Britain about the preparations being made in Brest for the warships to make their dash up the Channel—warnings which, alas, appear to have been overshadowed in British eyes by the reassuring messages sent on the same subject in the name of Mathilde Carré by the Germans at The Cattery.

Working with Colonel Rémy in Brest at this time was a gallant French submarine commander, Lieutenant Jean Philippon, who despite the risks he took lived to become, after the war, the Commander of the aircraft carrier *Arromanches*. Less fortunate was the radio operator who sent the first of the regular wireless reports from Brest to Britain on the condition of the three warships after each of the R.A.F. raids. For this operator, a Leading Seaman of the French navy, Bernard Anquetil, was finally tracked down by the Germans and shot in October 1941.

Month after month, after the warships had taken refuge in Brest, these heroes of the French Resistance kept London regularly—and accurately—informed of what was going on. As early as November 1941 a first warning was sent that preparations appeared to be in progress for a break-out. London, according to Colonel Rémy, replied by urging that the watch on the ships should be intensified, and this was done. Because of the arrest of Bernard Anquetil, Lieutenant Philippon recruited another Leading Seaman of the French navy, Arsene Gall, to operate a radio transmitter in Brest itself, so that no time should be lost in making the transmissions to London. This was done at great personal risk, since Lieutenant Philippon was still in the uniform of a French naval officer, and Brest at that time was packed with Gestapo spies.

The first urgent warning was sent by Leading Seaman Gall from his transmitter installed in a little house at Coat Meal, in the suburbs of Brest, on December 6, 1941. It read:

*Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen preparing to depart. Preparations for availability of docks eight and nine for January first appears to indicate departure of the three ships possible between January first and fifteenth with a view to a combined naval operation possibly with the Tirpitz.*

Bombing of the ships by the R.A.F. was intensified, but the anxious agents in Brest were forced to report back that the attacks had been largely ineffective.

On February 1st a further urgent warning was sent to London, this time by one of Colonel Rémy's transmitters in Paris. It ran:

*Scharnhorst and Gneisenau in condition for action. Departure likely to take place around eleven one*

evening or midnight during the next period of the new moon. Route they will take still unknown.

The watch was maintained and finally a further message was sent, again, from Paris, on February 7. This last warning ran:

Departure absolutely imminent. Pay special attention to the period of the new moon.

This warning was, as it turned out, despatched only four days before the actual break-out occurred. Alas, it seems to have been disregarded in London. At least a contributory reason for this must have been that, just as the Rémy organisation was sending its urgent warnings to London, a series of completely contradictory messages about the warships was being sent out from The Cattery in the name of Mathilde Carré. These messages from 'Victoire' solemnly informed the British that the three German warships were quite unable to put to sea, and it seems that those in authority in London chose to believe the radio of The Cattery rather than the urgent advice of Colonel Rémy.

It could be argued that there was at least a partial excuse—or anyway an explanation—for this. In the days when Armand and The Cat had been working the Inter-Allied network it had always proved particularly trustworthy in its report from the Channel and North Atlantic coasts, for Armand had laid special stress on the efficient organisation of the network in those areas. So it was hardly surprising that when in the early part of 1942 the War Office began receiving from Madame Carré's radio in France a series of messages about the three warships they should have attached particular importance to what The Cat reported. This was briefly that the three warships had been so badly damaged by the Royal Air Force that there was no chance of their being able to put to sea again for

many months. And the misleading messages added that in any case most of the crew had now gone ashore.

It was Borchers himself who after the war described this episode in a statement made in Hanover in January 1953 to the *Daily Mail*. “Yes, it’s true,” said Borchers. “The messages which were sent to the Admiralty at that time in the name of ‘Victoire’ offered conclusive evidence that the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* had been so seriously damaged that they would never again leave their berths.”

In his statement Borchers added, “At Brest big celebrations were organised on board the ships and thousands of people were invited as guests. Men were given shore leave to allay suspicion and only six men knew of the plan to make the dash next morning—the three ships’ captains and their navigating officers.

“On February 11 the ships went out into the harbour while the local population watched what they thought was only a mild form of manoeuvre. At the last moment they suddenly steamed for the open sea, their engines racing flat out. They kept up this dash until they were well clear of the English Channel and under the lee of the German coast.”

On the British side, a photographic reconnaissance on the afternoon of February 11 had shown that the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* were all in the main harbour. Torpedo booms were in place protecting the ships. A move from Brest that night was therefore thought unlikely and a watch kept on movements of enemy fighters noted no signs of unusual concentrations.

It must have been just about this moment that the vital and falsely reassuring messages were received in London from The Cattery. That night a normal Coastal Command patrol was ordered from 7.40 p.m. until 7 o’clock the following morning. But for some reason the radar equipment failed. There was a gap of three hours in the patrol between 7.40 and 11.38 p.m. And it was at 9 p.m. that

the German squadron left Brest. As luck would have it, not only did the British fail to replace the night patrol, but there was also no strong morning reconnaissance sent out. It was not until the following morning that the enemy ships were first seen by fighter patrols in the Eastern Channel, and at long last a series of ineffectual naval and air attacks against the warships was launched.

The news that the 'S and G', as they became known, had escaped the combined clutches of the British navy and air forces caused a sensation both in Britain itself and throughout the world. Dismay was intensified when, in the papers of February 14, readers saw the German announcement that the three warships had safely reached their port of destination. There was a clamour in Parliament and a long investigation by a Board of Enquiry set up by Mr. Churchill. The result of the Board's investigations was not made public until after the war. One of its findings was that 'the main reason for our failure' was that we had been taken by surprise. And, looking back today, there seems little reason to doubt that one of the main contributing causes to our lack of alertness must have been the falsely reassuring messages sent out from the little radio set at St. Germain in the name of Mathilde Carré.

## CHAPTER 11

### The Man from the Sky

AND now there comes into the story of The Cat a new figure, a man who had arrived in war-time France direct from Britain, and who was destined quickly to become one of the principal actors in her drama.

He was a Frenchman, dapper, with lively intelligent eyes, a calm manner and a cool, clear brain. He had also a fervent sense of patriotism and great personal courage. His name was Pierre de Vomecourt—later to be known in this narrative by his Resistance name of ‘Lucas’.

His story went back to a day in June 1940, when a party of some twenty French officers and liaison officers with the British forces were lurching in a little restaurant near the Cherbourg railway station, earnestly discussing the best way to get to Bordeaux, as they had been ordered to do on leaving their British units which were embarking for England. Suddenly in the adjoining café the wireless broadcast the heavy voice of Marshal Pétain announcing his request for an armistice. After a long silence one of the officers, Pierre de Vomecourt, rose and announced that for his part he would not accept the armistice and that he was certain that the British would continue the fight. Therefore, he said, he proposed to go to Britain in one of the last ships to leave French soil. After a confused and protracted discussion the majority of those Frenchmen present decided that it would be better to wait a little before taking so grave a decision. So Pierre de Vomecourt left his comrades and embarked alone on the last ship but

one which left Cherbourg for England in the night of June 17-18.

In Britain de Vomecourt conceived the project of preparing the general uprising of France against the invader and presented his plan for action to the 'Deuxième Bureau' of General de Gaulle in London, which, still in the early stages of development, appeared not to be interested. Rejected by the French, Pierre de Vomecourt applied to the British. At first they replied to him that the occupied countries such as Poland were, with British support, organising for themselves their propaganda and sabotage networks and that it was better to give the French in London time to organise on similar lines. But in January 1941, tired of waiting, the British prepared to despatch their own Resistance agents. Under his newly-acquired name of Lucas, Pierre de Vomecourt was parachuted into France on May 11, 1941, in the region of Châteauroux—the first agent of S.O.E. from Britain during the war to be parachuted into occupied territory. Lucas's two brothers were in France when he arrived there and they at once joined his network. Their Resistance group formed an integral part of what later became known variously as 'The Firm', 'The Racket', and, more officially, as The French Section of the Special Operations Executive of the War Office.

The 'S.O.E.' was organised in the early part of 1941 with precise, if unconventional, objectives: espionage, sabotage, murder if necessary—every possible means of causing the utmost alarm, despondency and destruction to the forces of the enemy inside occupied Europe. Like most enterprises of its kind, it was undoubtedly misled by the enemy on numerous occasions and had not a few private tragedies, in which the lives of heroic men and women were lost. One of its greatest disasters, that which occurred in Holland, has been described in detail in *Operation North Pole*—and The Firm had certainly its

tragic errors in France as well. But it had many successes too—and by D-Day it could claim that it had over fifty networks operating in France, all controlled from the luxurious block of flats in Baker Street which was its headquarters.

But in the days when Lucas joined The Firm it was in its very early stages, and had many vicissitudes to go through and many mistakes to make before it gained wisdom and experience.

Lucas, after a period of intensive training in the arts of espionage and sabotage at a closely-guarded country house in England's New Forest, was finally ready to go back to his own country on his dangerous mission. He was parachuted into France, along with a wireless operator and a short-wave radio set.

In the ensuing months Lucas had many adventures, which are not immediately relevant to this story. But what was a vital event was that in the early autumn his radio operator was tracked down and arrested by the Germans, and Lucas found himself suddenly cut off from communication with London.

It was an anxious moment for him as he went around Paris contacting people, seeking to build up his Resistance network and extend its activities, yet unable either to report progress to headquarters or to request from them help of any kind. Paris itself was dark, dismal and cold in that winter of 1941. The food shortage was already driving people to the black-market restaurants and Lucas himself was by this time running so short of money that he had to sell some of his personal possessions to keep going.

At this difficult period Lucas was joined in Paris by another emissary of S.O.E., a stocky, courageous and forthright Lancashire engineer, who had been in business in Paris before the war and thus knew both France and the French language intimately. His name was Major B. H. Cowburn and he had been dropped into France in the

slightly haphazard way in which things were being done in those days, with a mere £100 worth of francs in his pocket and instructions to carry out a 'lone wolf' mission of sabotage. Because he was posing as a Frenchman, he operated under the Resistance name of 'Benoit', but Lucas always called him 'Benny', and so it is as Benny that we will henceforth refer to him in this story. He, too, was now running short of money and had no channel available for obtaining any more from Britain. There was a glum little conference between the two men in Paris at which Lucas was forced frankly to admit: "We are completely cut off."

But within a few days Lucas had another meeting with Benny at which he had better news: there was, it seemed, after all a possibility of communicating with headquarters, for he had just been informed of the existence of a Franco-Polish Resistance group operating a clandestine radio with London. The head of the group, a Pole named Armand, had, it seemed, been arrested, but his work was being carried on by a gallant Frenchwoman named 'Victoire' or Mathilde Carré.

Lucas explained how he had met Mathilde Carré, through the mediation of The Cat's old friend and associate, a distinguished lawyer named Maitre Michel Brault, who was at that time acting as a contact for Lucas with a Resistance group in Western France. Since he knew that Mathilde Carré was in radio communication with London, he suggested that she might be just the person to help him. Lucas, having at that moment no alternative plan, readily fell in with that suggestion. Without delay Maitre Brault telephoned to Madame Carré. He told her, in carefully-disguised terms, of the arrival from England of an important agent whom it was most urgent for her to meet. How could he have known that this call, like all the others which The Cat was receiving at this time, was carefully listened to and duly noted by the vigilant Bleicher?

And so it came about that, on the evening of December

28, 1941, over such wartime apéritifs as the Café George V on the blacked-out Champs Elysées was able to offer, Lucas had his first encounter with The Cat—a meeting which was to have extraordinary consequences. As he glanced somewhat furtively around for fear of Gestapo spies, Maitre Brault introduced the couple. And, sitting in the background well concealed behind a copy of the evening newspaper *Paris-Soir*, Hugo Bleicher followed the encounter with interest and anticipation. But, just because of the danger that they might be overheard, Lucas proposed to The Cat that they should meet next day to continue their discussion in the little office which he had taken for himself, in the guise of a French business man concerned with transportation enterprises, in the building on the Champs Elysées which houses the cabaret The Lido, so beloved by foreign tourists.

It was after this first meeting that The Cat took stock of Lucas. And when she came to write her memoirs she recorded what had been her first impressions of the man who was destined to influence her fortunes so considerably. "He was essentially sympathetic to me," she wrote. "He was a clean, solid, idealistic person, with some very good ideas. In due course I found out that he had a very strong will, considerable nervous resistance, a cold calm courage and qualities partly of a spy and partly of a very experienced man of the world." And she added in her typical cold objectivity, "He seemed to me excellent material to improve and direct properly. That was Lucas, this young man of thirty-five." The Cat, of course, was no bad judge of character.

Certainly it must have been with high optimism that Lucas himself left that first café encounter with The Cat which seemed to promise at last the possibility of establishing contact with London once again. And it must also have been in high excitement that The Cat subsequently rejoined Hugo Bleicher and told him of how she, the

master-spy, had made this promising contact with a whole new segment of Allied espionage. But Bleicher apparently had at this stage some slight misgivings. He wondered whether the whole affair might not possibly be a trap? Was it possible, he wondered, that the activities of The Cat had in fact become known to the British and that they were working on a plan to dispose of her? What would happen to his '*kleines Kätzchen*' when she went to that rendezvous next day in the Lido office of Lucas? At any rate he decided to take no chances. He told The Cat to keep her appointment at eleven, but that he would wait outside the office in the street nearby. If she had not reappeared safely by noon, he would come up and see what had happened to her. And because Bleicher also had a second misgiving—that it was The Cat herself who was planning to double-cross him—he took the opportunity to remind her that she was still in the complete power of the Germans—and, "so don't try any tricks with us," he said.

Nobody knows what was really in the mind of The Cat at this stage when she made her first contacts with Lucas. Did she see in this new meeting merely a fresh chance to ingratiate herself to the Germans by betraying yet more members of the Resistance? Or could it be that, even at this stage, she envisaged the possibility of redeeming something of the evil which she had already done, of revenging herself on the Germans who had arrested her and exploited her, by double-crossing them and working once more for the Allies? Or was she simply stimulated by the thrilling prospect of a new intrigue, much more far-reaching than anything that had gone before? In any case, whatever her motives, The Cat at this moment obviously had to walk warily, to find out exactly how the land lay before she committed herself further to either side.

So up to the office of Lucas went The Cat that day and the two talked quietly and at length of the possibilities for

their future collaboration. The Cat told Lucas the story which she had now learned so well by telling it many times before, that she was a staunch patriot who had re-grouped the Inter-Allied network following Armand's arrest, and was now carrying it on as before. Messages could, she assured him, be sent without difficulty over her radio transmitter to the Polish Intelligence staff in London, who would pass them on to his French Section. Lucas, having no alternative, agreed to try this route.

In apparent triumph The Cat went back to Bleicher and told him that all was going according to plan. "Now," she urged him, "you must leave everything to me." She must henceforth be allowed to move about freely, so that it should not be suspected that she was under German supervision, and, for more easy contact with Lucas, she would have to leave The Cattery at St. Germain and move into a flat in Paris. Bleicher agreed, and promptly The Cat went off house-hunting in the West End of Paris. The Germans gave her a list of all the flats which they had commandeered—flats, mostly, which had formerly belonged to British residents, Jews or other 'enemies of the Reich', and finally The Cat found one which exactly suited her in a smart block of apartments at 26, Rue de la Faisanderie. It was in to this flat that Mathilde Carré and Bleicher moved in January, in the guise of a harmless married couple, M. and Mme Jean Castel. To all appearances it was a highly harmonious ménage. There were cosy dinners in the evenings and after them, Bleicher, the *Abwehr* official who only a couple of months previously had arrested Madame Carré, now had the task of nightly preparing her bath. This was something of a labour for the dutiful German: because of wartime restrictions on heating, the bath water for The Cat had to be specially boiled in saucepans in the kitchen and carried by the representative of the Master Race the length of the corridor to The Cat's bathroom. Yet Bleicher, according

to The Cat's own later testimony, amiably agreed to this nightly task—a further indication, it would seem, of the power which this not unduly handsome woman could exercise over men.

Obviously Bleicher was resolved to go into this affair of the Lucas organisation with true Teutonic thoroughness. He explained to The Cat that they would work on the case together and that there was no reason why he himself should not meet and associate with Lucas. The Cat, it was agreed, would present him to Lucas in the guise of M. Castel, a Belgian business man—which would account for any traces of a strange accent in his otherwise excellent French. And, as a Belgian sympathising with the Resistance, Bleicher would be able to meet not only Lucas but other members of his organisation as well. Meanwhile The Cat would relay between London and Lucas all the radio messages they wanted—and as they passed through his hands in transit, Bleicher would read all these with the greatest interest.

Lucas himself proceeded as warily as he was able to in the circumstances, for at that stage he had, of course, no possible way of knowing that The Cat was in German employ. The first telegram which he asked The Cat to send to the Poles in London for relay to his own organisation was a simple and harmless one. It merely asked the French Section to acknowledge receipt and confirm whether he could continue to get into touch with them through that particular channel? With no delay at all—Bleicher saw to that!—the message was despatched over the radio, which had now been moved from The Cattery at St. Germain and was installed in a house in the Rue Theophile Gauthier at Neuilly. And promptly London's answer came back—affirmative.

For London, like Lucas, had at that moment hardly any alternative than to use this particular channel as the only available means of communication with their agent

in France. What had happened at the London end was subsequently explained to me by Colonel Buckmaster, who, by the time that Lucas had met The Cat, had taken over the command of the French Section at its headquarters in Baker Street. As the pre-war manager of the Ford motor company in Paris, Colonel Buckmaster had an intimate knowledge both of France and the French language.

Colonel Buckmaster informed me that his office had received the first message from Lucas from another organisation, who warned that they regarded its source as a somewhat suspicious one. "But the message itself was obviously genuine," said Colonel Buckmaster. "We sent back to Lucas certain check messages containing questions to which only he would know the answer—and, of course, since Lucas was receiving our messages, the answers came back to London correctly."

In one of his messages sent over The Cat's transmitter, Lucas asked for a radio operator to be sent out to him. This message elicited only the procrastinating reply: "No men yet trained and ready to leave: have patience."

Then Lucas sent an urgent message saying that he was short of funds and asking that money should be sent to him with the least possible delay. It was London's prompt reaction to this appeal which probably, more than anything else, confirmed his temporary confidence in The Cat. For within only a few days Lucas was notified that a very large sum of money was waiting for him at the hands of a certain prominent Allied diplomat in Vichy, a man who was above all suspicion of being a German agent. It was natural for Lucas now to conclude that The Cat must indeed, as she claimed, be in touch with London, for otherwise the money could not have come to him through such an unimpeachable channel.

After weeks of anxiety and of living from hand to mouth,

Lucas and Benny and Lucas's chief assistant, a former Parisian business man named Roger Cottin, were greatly cheered by the safe arrival of the money from London. They held a celebration lunch at a famous Russian restaurant behind the Etoile, the Auberge d'Armaillé, and, as was only natural, they invited The Cat along to join them. It was a prolonged and gay celebration which was held among the heavy red plush décorations of imperial Russian style and under the glassy stare of the stuffed boar's head hanging on the restaurant's wall. The Cat's eyes sparkled as sashliks were carried in on flaming swords and toasts were drunk in vodka. She told the assembled company all over again her carefully composed story of how she had taken over Inter-Allied after Armand's arrest and then, as the merry meal proceeded, she vied with the men in telling a succession of deep blue smoking-room stories. And, from somewhere far in the background of the dimly-lit restaurant, the party was observed with interest and approval by at least one of Bleicher's men.

And now came another message from London for Lucas which aroused the eager anticipation of Hugo Bleicher. It announced that, in response to Lucas's requests, a quantity of arms and ammunition would be parachuted by the R.A.F. in a field near the village of Vaas, near Le Mans. When The Cat duly reported this to Bleicher back in the flat in the Rue de la Faisanderie, he rubbed his hands eagerly. "This is something I would like to see myself," he said.

Together Lucas and Roger Cottin discussed the arrangements for the night of the parachuting operation. Lucas sent Roger on ahead to Vaas, and he accepted with alacrity the disingenuous offer made by The Cat of transportation to the scene of the operation. For Mathilde Carré explained to Lucas that her trusted friend, the Belgian business man M. Castel, would gladly place his

private car and Belgian chauffeur at the disposal of Lucas for such a worthy cause as helping the Allies.

And so it came about that at five o'clock on the evening of January 6, Lucas, The Cat, and Bleicher in the guise of M. Castel, all met at a little café near the church of St. Germain des Prés and set off for Vaas. They picked up Roger outside Le Mans and he introduced them to a local school teacher, who guided them to the actual field on which the containers were due to be dropped. On all the journey out Bleicher talked very little to the others in the car, no doubt for fear of betraying himself by his German accent. Indeed, it was a silent journey, for Lucas was equally disinclined to discuss his affairs with outsiders.

It was a bitterly cold night, and the little party sat around on the field waiting for the aeroplane from Britain to arrive, and eating sandwiches which Bleicher had thoughtfully brought with him from *Abwehr* headquarters. They waited hour after hour but the aeroplane never came—and finally the party gave up its vigil, went to a nearby peasant's house to sleep as best they could until dawn—and then all returned to Paris again after their vain mission.

Bleicher, it may be supposed, accepted this disappointment philosophically, believing that he would have many more opportunities in the future to see at first hand how the British sabotage experts worked.

## CHAPTER 12

### Shadow of Doubt

THROUGHOUT those anxious, bitterly cold days of January, in a Paris that was grey and grim, The Cat seemed to be in her element. With her little red hat perched jauntily on one side of her head, she pursued indefatigably the stimulating turn which her adventures had taken, journeying daily from Bleicher's flat to her next rendezvous with Lucas or hurrying to some other assignation. She rejoiced in the new degree of freedom which the Germans had given her to enable her to fulfil new missions for them—and on one occasion she triumphantly arranged a luncheon at a restaurant called the Vignes du Seigneur at which she introduced Bleicher to a close friend of hers who was also a high official of the Deuxième Bureau of Vichy.

But in the attitude of Lucas himself towards his recently found friend a subtle change was beginning to occur. A first faint cloud of suspicion about Mathilde Carré was beginning to form in his own shrewd and logical mind—a suspicion so faint at the beginning that it was no more than a hesitant question-mark.

For one after another there occurred a series of small incidents which contributed to build up the shadow of a doubt about the activities of The Cat as Lucas, with his faculty for cool and reflective judgment, reviewed the situation. First he recalled the arrest of Armand de Dampierre, a close personal friend of Maitre Brault, from whom Lucas had heard the story. Dampierre, a brave and

aristocratic Frenchman occupying an important position, had given considerable assistance to The Cat in the early days of the Inter-Allied activities, particularly in regard to shipping movements. Madame Carré had visited him regularly. Then, on December 2, he had suddenly been arrested by the Germans and no more had been heard of him. Who could it have been, Lucas asked himself. Who had denounced him?

Then there was the mystery about the delayed delivery of a telegram from London which was transmitted to him by The Cat after being received on the radio installed at Neuilly. This telegram was from the French Section in London and announced to Lucas that a Lysander pick-up operation had been arranged to take place in a field near Chartres. But the telegram was handed to Lucas by The Cat at three o'clock one afternoon and, reading it, he found to his dismay that the operation was timed to take place that very night. The plan as outlined in the message was that Lucas was to wait until eight o'clock that evening to hear a certain code message broadcast in the French services of the B.B.C. If the message was broadcast, it was to serve as confirmation that the operation would take place as planned. "But," as Lucas subsequently explained to me, "at that time when there was no possibility of arranging rapid transport it was a sheer impossibility to get out to Chartres in so short a time." And so, reflecting later on this mishap, it was inevitable that Lucas should wonder whether The Cat had deliberately held up the delivery of the telegram until it was too late for him to keep the rendezvous with the Lysander. Yet, if this was the case, could she possibly be the ardent agent of Resistance which she represented herself to be?

There was a shadow of a doubt, though only a faint one, forming, too, in the mind of Lucas's friend, Maitre Brault, in the days after he had arranged their introduction. Maitre Brault himself described to me the first two

incidents which occurred to shake the complete confidence he had originally felt in Mathilde Carré.

The first was no more than a slip of the tongue, a chance remark which would have had no significance at all except in the light of later events. It happened one day while The Cat was lunching at a restaurant up in Montmartre with Maitre Brault and his secretary Ginette, who was one of Mathilde Carré's best friends. As they talked, like most people in Paris at that time, about the uncertain prospects which the future held for them, Madame Carré had used a phrase which stuck afterwards in Maitre Brault's mind. She had said something about her determination to do the best she could "*avec ma petite vie*"—with my little life—adding, "I have only one life, after all." Perhaps it was not significant at all, but all the same at the time Maitre Brault thought it was an odd remark to come from somebody who was supposed to be risking her life daily in Resistance activities.

The second incident was a far more serious matter and concerned the arrest of another prominent member of the Resistance, Colonel François Michel, who not long before had left Vichy to cross the demarcation line and associate himself with Resistance groups in occupied territory. One day, before Maitre Brault had learned of the Colonel's arrest, The Cat visited him and pulled from her bag a photograph of Colonel Michel. "Is this the man we are expecting to see up here soon?" she asked. Maitre Brault said that it was, and The Cat left him shortly after, making no further comment. "At that time," said Maitre Brault, "it did occur to me to wonder where she could have secured that picture." The answer came some days later, when, on one of his visits to Vichy, Maitre Brault met the former secretary of Colonel Michel, Madame Loubetzka, who mentioned to him that, before setting out on his journey to occupied France, the Colonel had had a new passport photograph taken for the false papers which he

needed to cross the demarcation line. Madame Loubetzka showed Maitre Brault a copy of this picture—and he recognised it instantly. It was identical with the picture of the Colonel which The Cat had taken from her handbag. "At that moment it flashed into my mind," said Maitre Brault, "that Colonel Michel must have been arrested and his passport photo taken from him: that Madame Carré must have been given this picture by the Germans so that she could help them identify him—and that therefore she must be working for them. I felt it my duty to hurry back to Paris and warn Lucas of my suspicions."

But events now began to move fast, for within about forty-eight hours of this first firm suspicion Maitre Brault was himself the subject of a clumsy attempt at arrest by the Germans. Looking back now, it would seem that this decision to try to arrest Maitre Brault just at a moment when the activities of a whole group of Resistance men, headed by Lucas, was being kept under discreet and profitable observation by the *Abwehr* was one of the first of the serious blunders made by Bleicher in his conduct of the affairs of The Cat. In the analytical mind of Lucas the incident of this attempted arrest naturally sounded off like an alarm bell.

What happened was this: Maitre Brault returned with considerable anxiety to Paris and, after meeting his wife at a theatre that night, went back to his home in Rue Renouard after dark, so that the concierge did not see him go in. German Police, sent by Bleicher, arrived outside his apartment at six o'clock the following morning.

Telling me of this incident, Maitre Brault recounted: "It was my sister-in-law who first heard the door-bell ringing. She went to the door and shouted 'Who's there?'—and a demand to open up came back in a typical heavy German accent. I had always kept the key of the unoccupied servant's bedroom in the attic of our apartment house in the pocket of my dressing-gown, so when I

realised what was happening I fled through the back door and up the service staircase to the attic, and hid there.

"The Germans burst into the flat and summoned everybody to the salon, but my wife told them that I was still away and had not slept in the flat that night. After the Germans had waited for some time, my daughter, who was only sixteen then, pleaded that she must leave the apartment to go to school. They let her go and as soon as she got away from the building she went to a telephone and warned my friends about what was happening. Our nurse also told the Germans that she had to get on with her work and, as soon as they let her go, she managed to come up to me in the attic and smuggle up some clothes, bread and hot coffee all hidden in her shopping bag."

Finally, after hanging around the flat for most of the morning, the Germans gave up their attempt and disconsolately went away. Maitre Brault, who had spent about six hours in the attic and on the roof of the apartment house, was able to slip down the service staircase and out through the door and finally escape to safety.

"After I got to unoccupied France," Maitre Brault told me, "I sent off a number of warnings about Mathilde Carré. I sent one to London through Captain Scou, then Naval Attaché at the American Embassy in Vichy, one through the American Intelligence organisation of Allan Dulles in Berne and one through a member of the Vichy Intelligence service who was also working for the British." [These messages, however, had apparently not reached Britain when Lucas himself succeeded in returning to London and was able to unfold the whole story.]

Before he left Paris Maitre Brault had a meeting with Lucas and told him all that had happened. But at that moment he was still not absolutely positive that it was The Cat who had denounced him to the Germans. And blandly, The Cat, when told by Lucas of the attempted arrest of her friend, said simply, "Then we must do all

we can to help him escape"—and offered to provide a set of false identity papers for Maitre Brault which would help him to reach the safety of unoccupied France.

Oddly enough, it was these very papers which provided yet a further depth to the shadow of doubt about The Cat which was forming in Lucas's mind. For when she produced them he saw that they were absolutely perfect, genuine documents with genuine *Wehrmacht* stamps affixed to them—documents which really looked almost too good to be true. How could The Cat possibly have secured them, Lucas asked himself, unless her German contacts were suspiciously good?

So, quietly in his logical French brain, Lucas put together, one after the other, all these considerations—and finally came to his decision: he would confront Madame Carré directly with his suspicions of her and see what she had to say.

And this he did. On his very next meeting with her, at dinner that night, Lucas confronted Madame Carré with a series of searching questions. Why had Dampierre been arrested? Who could have betrayed him? Who had told the Germans about Maitre Brault? How had she secured the papers she had provided for him? From where had the photograph of Colonel Michel come? It must have been an emotional scene, for gradually, pressed by all these questions, The Cat lost her customary jauntiness and broke down. "I had better tell you the truth," she at last confessed to Lucas. "There is a man called Bleicher . . . ."

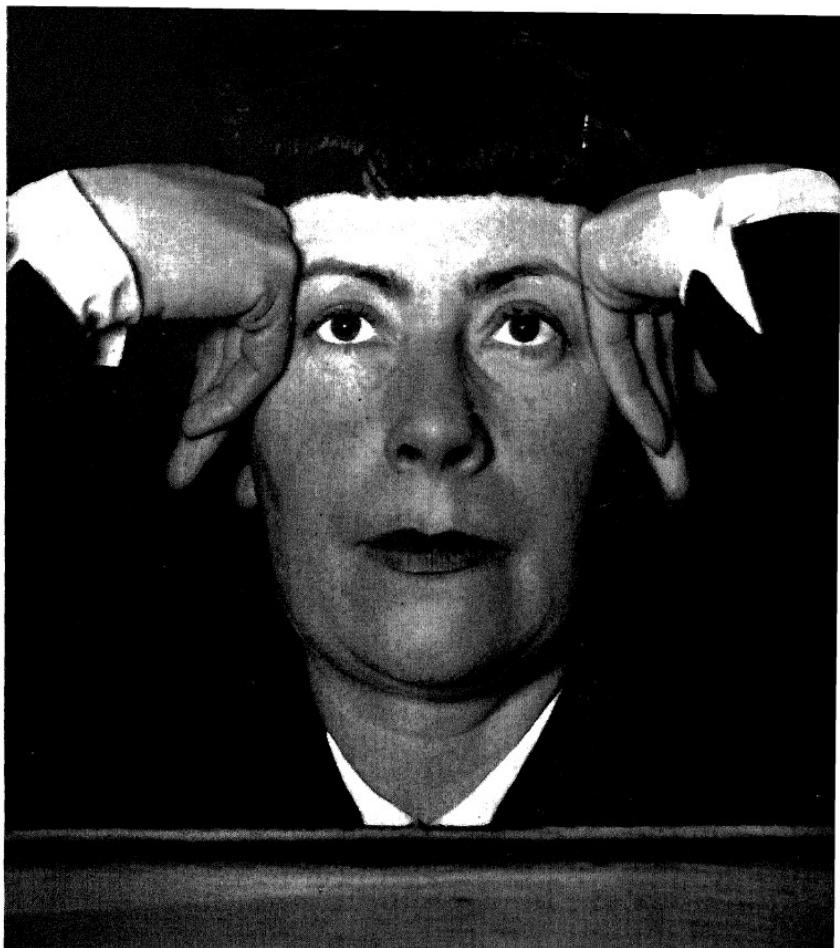
Now what exactly passed between this couple, each in their way under heavy pressure of anxiety at that particular moment, is something which only the two people themselves could relate. They had been thrown closely together for three weeks in the full atmosphere of tension under which all secret agents work. Each realised that both were, in different ways, in grave personal danger.

Lucas had been betrayed to the Germans, along with his associates. The Cat was now in real danger of being disposed of, if not liquidated, by Bleicher, if the Germans should learn that she had revealed her real role to Lucas.

Did Lucas at this moment trust the Cat? The question is largely irrelevant: whether he trusted her or not, his best gamble now in the interests of getting a warning back to London and of saving himself and his companions was obviously to act as though he did. As Lucas himself, years later, put it to me, "It was a game which had been started. Once you had begun, all you could do was to go on with it and hope for the best."

One thing is clear about this 'moment of truth' to which The Cat came in her dramatic talk that night with Lucas: it was a moment, even then, of only half-truth. Characteristically, even at this juncture The Cat did not tell Lucas quite the whole story. She told him of how she had been arrested at the time of the disaster to the Inter-Allied organisation and of how she had—under pressure she said—agreed to work for the Germans. But she tactfully refrained from describing the extent of the part she had played in the betrayal and arrest of all those of her former friends who were now in German hands. With a falsely assumed air of frankness she represented herself as a woman who had been too weak to resist the fears which she had felt after her arrest, under Bleicher's threats. But she assured him, "All I want now is to have a chance to redeem myself and get my revenge on the Germans."

It is hard to say exactly why, at this moment, The Cat decided to make her partial confession to Lucas and to take her decision to revert to working for the Allied side. Her decision may have been due to the emotion of the moment, to a genuine desire to 'work her passage back', to the personal influence of Lucas himself, or it may only



The Cat in court



Renée Borni in court on a stretcher

have been a shrewd calculation by a woman concerned entirely with her own self-interest.

For her own position with the Germans at that moment was becoming a highly precarious one, since it was dependent largely on the whim of Bleicher and the extent of The Cat's influence on him. As Lucas himself later explained: "Mathilde Carré must have known that as soon as she ceased to be useful to the Germans they would throw her to the dogs. She therefore had to find ever more people to betray in order to retain the confidence of her masters. But even betrayal would have to come to an end some day and then her downfall would inevitably occur. If she now collaborated with me and there should be a breakdown in our plans, I and my friends would be arrested—but she could always deny to the Germans that she had ever confessed to me. She could maintain that any such suggestion was merely being made by me because I was seeking to blacken her character in the eyes of the Germans so as to prevent her working for them any more. But, on the other hand, if our plans which we made together to work against the Germans should succeed, she would save her skin and could always claim to the Allies that she had redeemed her past betrayal. Above all—and this may have counted greatly in her mind—she would be the instrument of a unique counter-infiltration into the German Intelligence system, and she would have the personal gratification of being able to picture herself as the great spy pulling the strings of a puppet dance. That she herself might be used as a puppet she hardly even considered."

However that all may be, The Cat's secret now was out. When she had finished telling her story Lucas sat thinking for a while. All the multitudinous possibilities and perils of the situation, as now revealed by Madame Carré's confession, came crowding in on him. Bleicher knew all about him and his activities, had read all the telegrams he had exchanged with London, could use the radio to send to

London any misleading messages he liked and knew the identity of Benny and Roger Cottin and several others of his associates. What, in such a plight, were the immediate steps which he ought to take?

For a moment Lucas seriously considered the possibility of 'liquidating' Madame Carré on the spot. But she had told him that she was due to meet Bleicher again that evening.

"What time are you seeing him?" he asked her casually.

"In about two hours from now," The Cat replied.

Again Lucas pondered for a moment. If he should kill The Cat she would not be able to keep her rendezvous with Bleicher, the Germans would be warned that something had gone wrong and would certainly order the immediate arrest of all the members of the Lucas organisation. He himself would have time to escape and go into hiding, but not time to warn his colleagues, who would thus be sacrificed. Moreover it would be a long time before he would be able to warn the British that the wireless was in German hands, since once he went into hiding he would have to lie low for several weeks while the hunt for him went on.

And, as it seemed to Lucas, almost more important than the immediate well-being of himself and his colleagues was the imperative necessity of warning London about the radio which had been 'turned round' and now was in German hands. For already the messages from London had betrayed one vital military secret to the Germans—the fact that the British were considering a raid on the St. Nazaire dockyards. The message which had come to him, via Bleicher and The Cat, asking for all possible information on St. Nazaire had been taken by the Germans—as Lucas realised with horror—as a clear indication of British plans. Lucas himself had been working to collect the requested data, though he had not, up to that moment, had time to send it back to the War Office in London.

About this, too, it seemed to him vital that the British should be warned.\*

With all these considerations in his mind Lucas quickly decided that no bold dramatic step, like the murder of Madame Carré, could help to meet all the implications of the situation. Instead, he decided on a subtle but daring plan, taking into account The Cat's assurance to him that she wanted revenge on the Germans. If his plan succeeded, he calculated, it would be a triumph of 'counter-infiltration' of the *Abwehr*; if it failed only his own life would be at stake, since the lives of all the other members of his group known to Bleicher were in any case forfeited unless they could be extricated. So:

"Listen," said Lucas to The Cat, "this is what we will do."

He instructed The Cat to go and keep her appointment with Bleicher and to tell him an ingenious story. The Cat was to say that on that particular evening Lucas had suddenly become more frank with her and had confided to her that there had recently been in Paris a meeting of representatives of Resistance groups to arrange their respective operational areas, their possibilities of action and what help they needed from Britain. (Such a meeting had in fact taken place on New Year's Day in a bitterly cold room near the Etoile. It had been attended by M. Frenay, later Minister of the de Gaulle government, Lucas, his assistant Roger Cottin and three other people. Lucas had reason to believe that the Germans had in any

\* In the upshot, Lucas did in fact reach London in time to give a warning before the St. Nazaire raid took place. But those in charge of planning the raid apparently either disregarded Lucas's warning or decided that the risk that the Germans had been advised of British intentions was not great enough to justify the postponement or cancellation of the operation. In fact, the St. Nazaire raid took place on March 28, 1942—and when our troops withdrew they had lost 212 officers and men killed or missing out of a total force of 353.

case learned that this meeting had taken place so that there was no harm done by telling The Cat and Bleicher about it now.)

As a result of this meeting, The Cat was to tell Bleicher, it had been decided that Lucas was to return to Britain to give the authorities there an exact picture of the French Resistance as it stood at that moment, after which he would return to France again without delay. Once back in France, Lucas was—so Bleicher was to be assured—to hold another conference of Resistance leaders, to which he would bring back with him a British General. So the Cat was therefore to suggest to Bleicher that he should refrain from arresting either Lucas or his associates for the moment and that Lucas should be allowed to travel to London as planned. Then, on the return of Lucas to France, Bleicher could wait for the great meeting to be held and swoop on it, capturing in one blow not only Lucas and the other Resistance leaders but the ‘visiting British General’ as well.

“It may sound like a rather tall story,” said Lucas with a shy smile as he told me about this plan, “but in fact it was the only sort of ‘bait’ I could think of holding out to Bleicher at that moment to persuade him not to arrest us all, and I had a firm hope that he would swallow it.”

And Benny, the Lancashire man, sitting in on our conversation that evening, commented bluntly: “Aye—those who deal in lies are the first ones who believe lies.”

But on that first evening after her confession Lucas had no way of knowing for certain whether The Cat would now play straight with him or whether the Germans would swallow the bait. He stared thoughtfully after The Cat as she left to keep her appointment with Bleicher. He wondered how things would turn out. He must now wait, until the following afternoon when he was due to meet Madame Carré again—unless, of course, he was himself arrested in the meantime.

Heavy snow was swirling down on the silent wintry city. It was changing the face of Paris completely—just as completely, it must have seemed to Lucas, as his own situation had suddenly been changed by all that The Cat had just told him.

## CHAPTER 13

### Plot and Counter-Plot

FROM the moment when The Cat confessed to Lucas her association with the Germans, the lives of both of them became an increasingly tangled web of plots and counter-plots.

For at this moment The Cat with two faces was, in a sense, wearing both faces at once. She had not, of course, told the complete truth to Lucas—had omitted the details of her own series of earlier betrayals—but she was seeking to impress him as an honest and enthusiastic patriot eager only for revenge against the Germans. And, simultaneously, to Bleicher she was still the '*kleines Kätzchen*' helping him, with infinite ingenuity, to stalk his prey. She spent some of her days with Lucas and her nights with Bleicher—nights when she had to remember that a single incautious word uttered in a moment of passionate forgetfulness might betray to the German the double role she was now playing. Never, surely, can a woman have shown a greater talent for double-dealing. She must have been under a tremendous emotional strain—yet she carried through her role without faltering and without mistake, and, as the subsequent records showed, Bleicher trusted her right until the end.

But first there was that long night of discussion in the Rue de la Faisanderie when The Cat went back to Bleicher and told him the story which Lucas had so ingeniously concocted. Bleicher, it seems accepted the proposals not with misgiving but with delight. The Cat had done so much for him during their association, that it never

occurred to him that she might suddenly now be playing a different game.

While The Cat returned to Bleicher, Lucas for his part called a hurried conference that night with his two most trusted associates, Benny and Roger. The other members of his organisation he decided to leave for the moment in ignorance of their peril, for fear that they should lose their heads and try to get away, or talk too much, and also in the hope—justified as it turned out—that he could save their lives. But to Benny and Roger that night he told the whole story and frankly put before them the choice which lay open to them. They could either attempt to go into hiding at once, sacrificing the others and abandoning the hope of giving a rapid warning to London, or else they could take the risk of their far-fetched plan succeeding. Gallantly both men agreed to stick with Lucas and attempt his daring plan to counter-infiltrate the *Abwehr*. They had a final drink together and went back to their respective beds, uncertain, all of them, whether they would still be at liberty next day.

Thus, it was in a somewhat tense atmosphere that, in a café in the Rue Marbeuf, just off the Champs Elysées, the following afternoon, Lucas waited to meet The Cat and hear how Bleicher had reacted to the bait. Concealed nearby was Roger Cottin, ready to escape and warn the others if Lucas should be arrested.

But when she joined Lucas, The Cat was triumphant. "Bleicher agrees," she told him, "but he is having to discuss the plan both with his own department and with the Gestapo."

This was wonderful news, because even a respite of a few days would be enough for at least half of Lucas's plan to succeed—that of passing a warning to London. Lucas had sent an urgent summons to his brother Gauthier, who lived in unoccupied territory. Gauthier arrived next day, was told the whole story, and left again at once for Vichy.

Once there he sent a detailed account to the French Section in London. No longer, therefore, would Bleicher be able to do further harm to the Allies over The Cat's radio set.

But there still remained the element of doubt as to whether Lucas's plan as a whole would be accepted by the Germans. In particular it was a dangerous omen that the Gestapo were being called into the consultations on Bleicher's side. There was bitter rivalry between the *Abwehr* and the Gestapo, who were therefore likely to be predisposed from the start against any suggestion emanating from Bleicher. What could be done, Lucas pondered, to make the bait seem even more attractive to the Germans?

He hit on a plan that afternoon, as, after the meeting in the café, he went for a long walk in the snow with Mathilde Carré—since to walk in the open air was one of the few ways in wartime Paris of making sure that a conversation would not be overheard.

And the plan which Lucas now put forward was even more strange and bold than anything which had yet been conceived in the dramatic adventures of Mathilde Carré.

"When I go back to London," he told her, "you must come over with me, too."

In the eyes of the Germans, Lucas explained, The Cat would go to Britain as a secret agent of the *Abwehr*—but in reality she would go with him to tell the British all she knew, and stay there in safety for the remainder of the war.

"Go back and tell Bleiche," said Lucas, "that you may be able to persuade me to let you go with me, and that it will be a wonderful opportunity for him to send an agent of his own services to Britain. And you could tell him that you would be wonderfully placed in London to do good work for him, since you would be introduced there by somebody like myself, who obviously has the confidence of the British."

Even The Cat, it seems, was slightly aghast at the bold-

ness of this plan. At first she objected, "Surely we could never pull that off? Why, even when I once wanted to travel alone to Vichy, Bleicher wouldn't take the risk of letting me go." But as Lucas talked on she gradually became fired with his enthusiasm.

"Do try to pull it off," he urged her. "You could do so many useful things in London, you would have so much that you could tell the British."

And finally The Cat agreed to go off at once and put up this project, too, to the unsuspecting Bleicher.

Lucas himself decided not to tell London in advance that he proposed to bring The Cat with him. He feared that some 'brass hat' in London, imperfectly informed about the situation, might reject his proposal out of hand—and a formal refusal from London would put him in an awkward situation.

If this further plan succeeded, Lucas argued to himself, it would be something of a triumph. It would enable him to take over to London someone who could give the most valuable information on the Germans, their organisation and their methods and it would, for the rest of the war, render Mathilde Carré harmless.

So off again back to Bleicher went The Cat and in high excitement told him of the new proposal—putting it to him as though she had thought of it all herself, as though it was yet another stroke of genius by his '*kleines Kätzchen*', the master spy.

And Bleicher, once again, was enthralled by the idea. Enthusiastically he put this plan, too, up to his superiors, who also agreed that it was *fabelhaft*, except for one *Abwehr* officer who expressed misgivings about whether The Cat could really be trusted.

"I'll vouch for her myself," said Bleicher—and The Cat rewarded him by impressing a girlish kiss on his forehead.

All of which, in high delight, she recounted to Lucas at a subsequent meeting.

There were only two snags. Berlin itself had been informed of the project, had announced that a high official from headquarters was being rushed to Paris to investigate and that nothing definite should be done until he had given his approval. And the Gestapo, also informed and still surly with enmity against the *Abwehr*, was bluntly opposed to the plan and was advocating that the whole bunch of Lucas and his friends should be arrested and shot out of hand so that nobody should be bothered further with them.

So, anxiously for a day or two longer, Lucas, Benny and Roger were forced to wait on in uncertainty in Paris, hoping that the high official would come soon from Berlin and that Bleicher would, as Benny put it, "prove a good advocate of his own downfall".

Those days were spent by Lucas in meticulous planning and in further organisation—in preparation, as far as was possible, for all eventualities. In conference with Roger, he made a careful assessment of everything which had now become known to Madame Carré and the Germans. They reached the conclusion that, despite all that had happened, the greater part of the Lucas network was still unknown to the *Abwehr* and they decided that, if all possible precautions were taken, this section could be developed into what was called by Lucas a 'parallel network'. Whatever happened to Lucas and his immediate contacts, his parallel network could continue to function for the benefit of the Allies.

This new secret organisation, swiftly established while the Germans were still debating what to do with Lucas and The Cat, comprised, as can now be told, M. Brune (who later became French Minister of the Interior), M. Gourdeau, a former deputy and Minister, Batonnier Ribet, a well-known barrister, the Marquis de Moustier, an industrialist and also a former deputy, M. Antonini, assistant general secretary of the French railways, and

many other brave men in Paris and other parts of France. Thanks to M. Gourdeau and M. Brune other parachuting grounds, unknown to the Germans, were found, with friends nearby prepared to receive and store containers. All this was developed and carried out within the few weeks before Lucas and The Cat left for Britain—and this parallel network remained unknown to the Germans throughout the whole war.

Then came the triumphant day when The Cat met Lucas again and gave him the news they had all been waiting for: the high officer from Berlin had given his approval to the plan to send Madame Carré to Britain and even the Gestapo now were no longer opposing it. Bleicher, with the past list of successes against Inter-Allied to his credit, had succeeded in convincing his German colleagues that, with the help of The Cat, he would once again outwit the hated British. So once more there was an excited meeting between The Cat, Lucas and Benny—and once more a discreet celebration. The Cat reported with delight on her recent conversations with German officers. Even at that early stage of the war—before Stalingrad and El Alamein—the Germans, it seems, were becoming somewhat uncertain of the final outcome. One Gestapo officer at that time—January 1942—put the chances of a German victory no higher than fifty per cent., explaining, "Those damned English swine have managed to keep their world communications open while we, however strong we are, are nevertheless boxed in." Lucas drank in every word The Cat reported for subsequent recounting in London.

Now there remained little more to do than to make the final arrangements for the strange journey.

Benny, who knew the coast of Brittany, was given the task of finding a suitable spot for the embarkation, while Lucas laid his plans for what was to happen to the radio transmitter in Neuilly after his departure. He decided that

if the transmissions from London were going to serve to mislead the Germans—if the German-controlled transmitter was to be, in the technical phrase, ‘turned round’—somebody of the Lucas group would have to remain behind to receive the messages, after they had been duly read and noted by Bleicher. Roger Cottin accepted this dangerous duty of staying on in Paris after Lucas and The Cat had departed. Lucas hoped and believed that Roger would remain unharmed until his own official return from London, because the Germans would not want to risk spoiling their long-term plan to round up the whole organisation by arresting Roger at that particular stage of the proceedings. Then, once Lucas had returned to France, it was hoped, the escape of Roger himself could be organised.

One thing was perfectly apparent from everything which The Cat reported to Lucas in those hectic days of preparation for the journey to Britain: they could count on receiving every possible co-operation on their trip from the German side. Madame Carré recounted that Bleicher and his associates were in high excitement at the prospect of the trip, which they regarded as promising one of the *Abwehr*'s greatest wartime triumphs. Bleicher had promised Madame Carré that on her return to France from her British mission she would be feted by the Germans. “And you will get money, too—a lot of it,” he promised her. “And perhaps be taken to meet all the most important men in Berlin. Oh, you will be the most famous woman of the war!”

On the German side everybody, right up to the top, was, it seemed, now solidly behind the project of sending The Cat to London. General von Stuelpnagel himself, so Madame Carré reported, had given personal orders to the Admiral commanding in Brest to keep his coastguards clear from any point where the embarkation might take place. Similar ‘look the other way’ orders were given to

German patrols in the area. As Benny succinctly commented: "I guess we could have a Messerschmitt escort too if we would like it."

But up to the last moment there remained the possibility that something might go wrong, that some official in Berlin might still oppose the plan, that The Cat herself, by some slight indiscretion, might give Bleicher an inkling that he was being double-crossed. But Lucas himself could do no more now than wait anxiously for the message to come from London fixing the actual rendezvous for their departure from the coast of France.

At last the eagerly awaited message came, on Wednesday, February 11. 'Rendezvous for night of February 12,' it said. The place: a tiny spot on the Breton coast called the Moulin de la Rive. Everything now seemed all set for The Cat to journey to her strange new hunting-grounds.

## CHAPTER 14

### The Embarkation

THE process of shipping two Allied secret agents to wartime Britain from occupied France was obviously never a simple one. But the task of transferring two agents across the Channel with the full knowledge and active assistance of the highest German authorities proved—strangely enough—almost more hazardous and complicated still.

With the aid of Lucas and Benny and other sources I was able to piece together the story of how the embarkation took place and it seems necessary to admit that, during these days of anxiety, suspense, danger and discomfort, The Cat displayed qualities of courage, physical endurance and good-humour which would have been remarkable in any woman. As one of the British officers who came into contact with her at this period inelegantly but admiringly remarked to me: "That female cat certainly had guts."

Once the message had been received from London fixing the coastal rendezvous for Lucas, there were days of hectic preparation. In high excitement Bleicher gave The Cat her last-minute instructions for the mission which, as he believed, she was to carry out for him. He asked her to collect in Britain, and bring back with her on her return, as many names as possible of British Intelligence officers. And also, he added, he would be glad if she could bring him back some British cigars.

Bleicher said he would not give The Cat any addresses of German agents in Britain whom she could contact, for fear that the British would keep her under constant super-

vision and trail her everywhere she went. (As, indeed, they did.) And when she asked him whether, in fact, there were many German agents still at liberty in London at that stage of the war, Bleicher laconically replied, "Far fewer than we would like."

The Cat packed a suitcase for her journey—a black coat and skirt, blouses, three dresses and even a pair of black silk pyjamas which the Germans had once admired when she had appeared in them at the St. Germain villa.

The two sides in the affair had, of course, drawn up two quite different plans for the embarkation. The German intention was this: one of Bleicher's colleagues, named Captain Ekkerth, and another German officer would go on ahead to the coast to make sure that all was well and that the local coastguards and German patrols understood their instructions not to interfere with any suspicious activities they might encounter in the immediately ensuing days. The two Germans would watch from the coast to see that Lucas and The Cat got off safely and, as soon as they had departed, the Englishman Benny (who, since he knew the coast well, was going to see them off), would be arrested and shot the same night. These German intentions were duly reported to Lucas by The Cat.

The British plan, as drawn up by Lucas, was this: that all should go to the coast as arranged, but that, instead of leaving Benny behind, as the Germans expected, he should be pushed into the boat with them at the last moment and taken to safety in Britain. And with heady enthusiasm Lucas and The Cat discussed the rich possibilities of the future—the air raid they would help the R.A.F. to make on Fresnes to make possible the escape of the Gestapo's prisoners there, the possibility of returning to France to blow up the *Abwehr*'s headquarters at Maisons Laffitte—even, as The Cat glowingly suggested, the possibility of poisoning Bleicher. But there were many stern realities to be faced before such dreams could be realised.

At last the great night came, Thursday, February 12—the eve, as The Cat tactfully refrained from pointing out, of Friday the thirteenth—which would see the moment of the actual embarkation. So on that Thursday evening the party left in the Paris-Brest express. Lucas and The Cat travelled together in one compartment, Benny in another and in a third Captain Ekkerth and his brother officer, who had not had time to go on ahead as originally intended. The two Germans were instructed to leave the train at Morlaix and go on by car to Moulin de la Rive, just east of Locquirec, the appointed embarkation spot, so that they would, in any case, arrive there before Lucas, The Cat and Benny.

There was not much sleep for that trio during the night as the express carried them towards the coast, only suppressed excitement mingled, no doubt, with not a little anxiety. For even at this stage of the proceedings all three of them were still in considerable personal danger. Benny was scheduled to be shot the following night. Lucas would share his fate if the Germans discovered at this late hour that they were being tricked. And, in that event, The Cat herself was in danger of finding that she could no longer play on the credulity of her former German associates, and once her usefulness to them was ended they might deal ruthlessly with her.

But the first stages of the journey went without incident. Lucas, The Cat and Benny left the express at Guingamp, and took a small train on to Plouaret. From there they set out to walk the remaining twenty-five miles to Moulin de la Rive, The Cat and Benny carrying suitcases, Lucas trudging along under the weight of a haversack into which he had stuffed a collection of the German-edited French newspapers which he was taking over for the use of British Intelligence.

Although it was only mid-February, it was a lovely day as the party set off from the station soon after dawn. The

early sun shone on the pretty country paths, birds sang, and there were even some first shy flowers along the route.

Everyone was suddenly in high spirits. Benny the North-countryman made one of his dour jokes. "Here we are," said he. "A French spy, a British spy and a German spy. All we need now is the Ogpu."

They lunched at a village bistro on the way—a gay lunch, very different from the normal fare of Paris restaurants: onion soup, a great omelette and a tin of rabbit pâté which The Cat had thoughtfully brought with her, the whole washed down by good red wine. And then they all set off again to Locquirec, the nearest little town to Moulin de la Rive.

During that afternoon the weather quickly began to change. The sun disappeared, storm clouds gathered, a wind came up and it started to rain. By the time they reached the coast the sea had become menacingly rough.

They dined that night at a little hotel at Locquirec and finally set off in the darkness and the rain for the beach. On the way down there, they met a German patrol, who hurried past them, studiously avoiding looking at them.

To shelter against the cold wind and lashing rain, the little party huddled together in a cleft of the cliff and at the appointed time Lucas and Benny began to give the agreed signals, flashes of red and white light at intervals of ten minutes. All three stared anxiously out into the darkness, but there was nothing to be seen except the black curtain of driving rain and the white froth of the angry sea.

Suddenly Lucas gave an exclamation and pointed. Two shadowy figures were making their way along the beach. Joyfully Lucas, Benny and The Cat clambered down to meet them. The two men, who wore civilian clothes, introduced themselves as members of Col. Buckmaster's organisation. One, Lt. G. W. Abbott, had been sent across as a radio operator and had a new transmitter which was

even at that moment being unloaded from two small dinghies drawn up on the beach. The other was an S.O.E. agent named Lt. Claude Redding. With them further along the beach were the naval officer who had accompanied them across, and the British sailors who had brought the boats ashore.

Hastily, as the wind howled and the rain lashed down, Lucas explained to the naval officer that all their plans must be changed. The two boats would have to take aboard not only himself, Lucas, whom the Navy had been sent to fetch, but also The Cat, Benny and the two S.O.E. men, who were obviously in imminent peril since the Germans would know of their landing. Lucas told the naval officer, a young Australian lieutenant, no details of the situation—only that the Germans knew of their presence and that all must get away at once. The lieutenant seems to have been a bewildered young man, slightly out of his depth with the complications of espionage on a foreign strand. But however surprised he may have been, he agreed to do as Lucas instructed.

So The Cat climbed precariously into the first naval dinghy, dragging her suitcase with her and clinging unsteadily to the side of the boat as it tossed madly about in the rough sea. The others followed and the dinghies tried to set off from the shore. But every moment the size of the waves increased and, only a few yards from the beach, both of them suddenly overturned, throwing all aboard into the bitterly cold water. The Cat found herself struggling in the sea, weighed down by her heavy black fur coat which seemed to be trying to drag her beneath the surface like some malicious animal. Wildly she struggled to be free and at last her feet touched the shingle of the beach and she managed to stagger to the shore. Her precious suitcase full of clothes, including her black silk pyjamas, had disappeared beneath the waves.

The dripping figures on the beach held a hasty consulta-

tion. There was an urgent signal to the motor gun boat which was waiting out at sea and an argument between the naval types on shore as to whether the M.G.B. could be brought into swimming distance. After a delay which seemed an age, the naval vessel moved slowly inshore. But it was unable to get in close enough to be within reach of the cold and anxious party on the beach. Finally the attempt was given up, the M.G.B. signalled that the time had come for her to withdraw—and a forlorn party was left behind: Lucas, The Cat, Benny, Abbott and Redding and the Australian officer in his British naval uniform. "I reckon we've had it," said the latter succinctly.

In a hasty consultation, it was decided that the party should break up. Lucas, The Cat and Benny walked back the three miles to the little hotel at Locquirec at which they had dined, and the hospitable innkeeper, woken at dawn, made them a log fire before which they tried to dry their dripping clothes. Abbott and Redding made their way up the cliff and hid during that day in a barn belonging to a Breton farmer named Geoffroy. This was the man who was accused of having denounced the two Englishmen to a local German patrol, and whom Henry Wales fought to have cleared of this charge. At any rate, later in the day, the Germans came to Geoffroy's farm and arrested Abbott and Redding, who spent the rest of the war in captivity. Because they wore civilian clothes they were in grave danger of being shot as spies. But at that period the Germans did not make a principle of shooting suspects on sight and, in the upshot, the two men were lucky enough to find themselves being treated as prisoners of war. The Australian naval officer was seen by the Germans walking across country in his British uniform and was also arrested—probably by some zealous German official who had no idea that his captive had been concerned in an operation organised with German connivance.

It was a miserable and anxious morning for Lucas, The Cat and Benny. They had come so near to triumph, and now found themselves frustrated—and also dripping wet, cold and hungry. The Cat had received a large gash in her leg where she had hit a rock while struggling in the sea, and her feet were also cut and bleeding from the sharp shingle on the beach. The good-willed hotel-keeper of Locquirec was unable to let them remain because his hotel had been requisitioned by the Germans and anyway the strange appearance of his bedraggled guests was not exactly an advantage.

Indeed it may seem odd that the soaked and tattered trio were able at all, without arousing intense suspicion, to make their way around the coastal area at the height of the war. The explanation lies partly, no doubt, in the inborn talent of all French people for minding their own business and partly in the fact that, at a time when transport was difficult and black market operations a general practice, there was nothing unprecedented in the sight of three wet and shabby people dragging suitcases and haversacks over the countryside. It was a time when most people felt that the fewer questions one asked, the better.

So, in the rain which still poured down, and getting wetter every moment, the trio made their way on to the nearby village of Lanmeur, where they lunched in a little restaurant and The Cat went off to the local German field-post to send a message back to Bleicher about what had happened.

Their only hope at that moment was that the British Navy would make another attempt to take them off on the following night, so that evening back they all went to Locquirec, dined in the little hotel, and once more made their way down to the beach.

It was another night of long vigil in bitter cold, with all three of them staring out forlornly to sea and, time after time, repeating the agreed signals. They signalled from

one o'clock in the morning until after four—but this time nothing came. Despairingly they made their way back up the cliff again just before dawn. It was obviously no good: this attempt at what was to have been a triumphant departure would have to be abandoned. They would have to return to Paris and start the plot all over again. No moment could have been more miserable or depressing, yet never once did The Cat complain either of her physical discomforts or her disappointment.

So that evening back the party went, first by car, then by train to Le Mans, where Benny, who knew the town, found them the only accommodation available: dirty rooms in a miserable hotel. After a good dinner out, their spirits rose again somewhat and the exhausted, dishevelled trio returned to the hotel and slept in their unsavoury beds until lunch-time the following day.

The most serious predicament now was obviously that of Benny; he was an Englishman, and the Germans had announced their intention of shooting him. Lucas decided, therefore, that it was too dangerous to allow Benny to return with them to Paris. Instead, he must make an attempt to escape to Britain on his own. So with instructions from Lucas, whose brother was working near the demarcation line, Benny set off south to attempt to reach Britain the long way round. Lucas told him that immediately he reached Spain he was to cable a warning to Britain about the activities of Mathilde Carré. Benny was lucky. Travelling by way of Vichy, Lyons (where an American girl came to his aid in a manner that has never yet been told) and the Spanish frontier, he finally reached Britain several weeks later. Gallantly he returned to France again soon after and, miraculously avoiding arrest by the Germans, was able to welcome the arrival of the liberating armies, and to settle down again after the war to his job in a comfortable office in the Rue Lafayette.

The same day as Benny set off south, Lucas and Madame

Carré caught a train to Paris, and on Sunday evening, February 15, a somewhat bedraggled Cat, in her sea-drenched black fur coat and with dishevelled hair, presented herself once again at Bleicher's flat at 26, Rue de la Faisanderie. Her first duty was, of course, to give Bleicher a reasonably convincing explanation of why Benny was no longer with the party. The story to cover Benny's escape had been thought up by the trio in the last moment before their ways separated in Le Mans. The Cat, it was agreed, should tell Bleicher that all three of them were getting thoroughly tired of British aeroplanes which did not arrive and British naval boats which failed to appear or overturned. So Benny (according to their story) had been sent off to the south to try and find a safe route across the Spanish frontier by which all three of them could eventually travel to Britain. Once more—to the relief, though slightly to the surprise, of Lucas and The Cat—Bleicher swallowed the story. ("Well, after all," said Benny as he told me this in Paris years later, "it was no more fantastic than some of the other nonsense which we made Bleicher fall for. It's wonderful how quickly you can think up a story when you are living by your wits all the time.")

So, while The Cat did her best to allay Bleicher's suspicions, Lucas without delay had a new message sent to London and, also without delay, London swung into action again. Though the French Section still knew nothing of the plan to bring The Cat to London, they must have realised that the failure of Lucas's first attempt at embarkation made it more urgent than ever that he should be taken across as soon as possible.

And, only three days after their return to Paris, on Wednesday, February 18, Lucas and The Cat (and Bleicher!) were informed on the radio from London that a new operation had been arranged for the night of February 19/20. So on the Thursday morning the two of them,

trailed again presumably by the indefatigable Captain Ekkerth, took a train for Brest. This time they left it at Lannion and from there went by bus to the new spot which had been decided on for the embarkation, a remote corner of the Breton coast called the Pointe de Bihit, south of Trebeurden. Once more they were hopeful and cheerful as they set out. When they saw a very obvious German official in plain clothes watching them as they changed from the train to the bus, Lucas laughed, "Now I suppose he'll telephone headquarters and tell them all is well and we are on our way."

It was a fine evening, with a red glowing sunset, as the couple rode through the pleasant countryside. Darkness had fallen by the time they reached Trebeurden. After dinner at the local hotel they set off once more on foot to make the ten-mile journey to the Pointe de Bihit. But this time there was no Benny to guide them through the unfamiliar, wild coastal countryside and in the darkness they lost their way. At midnight they found themselves in a village called Servel and, stumbling over rough country paths, they only just managed to get to the Pointe de Bihit by one o'clock in the morning, the appointed time for the rendezvous.

Once again Lucas flashed the agreed signals from the shore. Once again the couple peered anxiously into the darkness. And, once again nothing whatever happened. No answering light came from the sea, no welcome British figures appeared on the shore. By four o'clock Lucas gave up signalling, and he and The Cat huddled between the rocks to snatch what fitful sleep they could until the dawn. At seven they painfully made their way back to Trebeurden to warm themselves with hot coffee at a bistro, before taking the local bus back to Lannion, to spend the day waiting there.

That evening, after dinner, they clambered back into the bus from Lannion to the coast. It was so crowded that one

genial and vinous Breton fisherman sat himself down on the knees of another passenger who looked suspiciously like a German in plain clothes, sitting beside Madame Carré. Unabashed, the Breton gave a knowing wink to The Cat and said in a highly audible whisper, "Well, I suppose you'll be spending the night on the beach again?"

Which was, in fact, exactly what happened. Once more the fruitless signals, the long vigil huddled between the rocks for warmth, the despairing journey back again after dawn to Lannion.

"It's no use trying a third night," said Lucas. "Something must have gone wrong again. There's nothing else to do but go back to Paris."

But this time the couple returned to Paris with even heavier hearts than before. For now the delays and failure had lasted so long that there began to be a serious danger that the Germans would tire of the whole enterprise. The high authorities in Berlin might change their mind and give new instructions to Bleicher. Or Bleicher himself might conclude that the British were not making serious efforts to bring the embarkation off. Or, and this was a possibility ever in the minds of Lucas and The Cat, something might happen, some small incautious remark might be dropped by The Cat or someone else, that would betray to Bleicher that the whole enterprise was in truth designed to double-cross him. It was with such sombre thoughts as these to consider that Lucas and The Cat made their second despondent journey back to Paris.

When they got there, however, news reached them which promptly gave them new hope. For the ever-present Captain Ekkerth had watched the whole proceedings at the Pointe de Bihit and reported that, in fact, the operation had very nearly succeeded. The British motor gun boat had arrived off the coast as scheduled, but Lucas and The Cat had been concealed at a mistaken point, from which their flashing signal light could not be

seen by the British sailors on board. The Navy, pinpointing the rendezvous on a precise Admiralty chart, had apparently forgotten that its passengers had nothing but a rough tourist map to guide them. But Ekkerth described the correct place to The Cat, and he added encouragingly that at this spot there was even an abandoned ruin of a house in which the two could conveniently take shelter from the cold.

And Bleicher himself, so The Cat reported to Lucas, far from being suspicious or angry, was full of sympathy. "Poor little Cat," said he. "What a lot you go through without complaining." And there were jokes to the effect that The Cat's experiences as a spy were singularly unlike those of the conventional woman spy of romantic fiction who, always perfectly groomed, travelled everywhere exclusively in comfortable sleeping-cars and luxury hotels.

So in the upshot, after another exchange of messages over Bleicher's radio with the unsuspecting War Office, a fourth rendezvous was fixed, this time for the Pointe de Bihit on the night of February 26/27. And once more the couple set off from Paris for the coast, travelling via Morlaix and Lannion. Lucas still took with him his haversack stuffed with his belongings and the newest Nazi-edited newspapers. But The Cat carried nothing at all except her handbag: hard experience had taught her all too well the advantages of travelling light.

Once more, after dinner in Lannion, the couple went scrambling down the cliffs, this time to the abandoned house of which Ekkerth had told them. From the shelter of this house Lucas again anxiously flashed his signal lights. On and off flicked his torch into the unanswering darkness while, concealed somewhere on the cliffs above, Ekkerth kept watch on what was happening.

Suddenly Lucas gripped The Cat by the arm. "Put on your glasses," he said with suppressed excitement in his voice. "There they are!"

And this time, sure enough, The Cat could discern the dim outline of a motor gun boat moving cautiously in to a point surprisingly near the shore. The dinghy was launched and came rapidly to the beach, and Lucas and The Cat almost fell over themselves as they stumbled down the rocks from the abandoned house towards it.

## CHAPTER 15

### London in the Spring

THE motor gun boat of the Royal Navy which went to the French coast that night to fetch off de Vomecourt and The Cat was commanded by an R.N.V.R. officer, Lt. (later Cdr.) Dunstan Curtis, who today holds an official position in the Council of Europe at Strasbourg. On the deck stood Major Nicholas Boddington, one-time Paris correspondent of the *Daily Express* and a member of Colonel Buckmaster's French Section. He was conspicuous even in the darkness because of the white duffle-coat he was wearing. And, because it was never possible on such occasions to tell what kind of a reception would be waiting for a British officer on an enemy-occupied shore, Major Boddington carried in one hand a revolver and in the other a serviceable cosh.

Peering through the darkness, the Major at last discerned the two shadowy figures standing on the shore awaiting the arrival of the dinghy that was sent to fetch them. And as the dinghy returned to the ship, those on board were surprised by a sudden whiff of an expensive French perfume, wafted to them from Lucas's companion, whereat one of the sailors on the M.G.B. turned to Major Boddington and exclaimed in disgust and dismay, "Oh Christ, it's a bloody woman." And that was the first recorded British comment on the achievement, by the 'Mata Hari of the Second World War', of crossing to the British side literally under the eyes and physical protection of the Germans.

As the couple climbed aboard Lucas hastily explained the reason for Mathilde Carré's presence.

Somewhere up on the cliffs above them a light glimmered. "Don't like the look of that light," muttered the Major, as he hurried his passengers aboard the naval craft. He would have liked it even less had he known the truth that the light came, in fact, from the shelter in which the Germans were watching with interest the exact procedure adopted by the British Navy for smuggling Allied agents out of France.

The dinghy was hauled aboard and the motors of the M.G.B. began throbbing in the darkness as the little ship swiftly made off again towards the British coast.

The Channel was not really rough that night, but there was an inevitable swell which rocked the naval craft and soon made Mathilde Carré decide to go and lie down. Lucas and the Major remained on deck talking eagerly together all through the four-hour Channel crossing.

It was around dawn when they finally came softly and swiftly into Dartmouth harbour. The party climbed ashore and went straight to breakfast, a good English breakfast laid on by the Navy which quickly raised the spirits of everybody, even of The Cat, who had suffered somewhat during the crossing. There was Colonel Buckmaster himself who had gone to meet Lucas, whom he was eager to see as the first agent returned from occupied France, and who now was even more intrigued by Lucas's companion, perhaps the most unusual passenger transported on behalf of the Special Operations Executive at any time during the war. And at the table too was Major Boddington whom, because of his white duffle-coat, the irrepressible Mathilde Carré promptly christened with a provocative twinkle in her eye '*Le Père Blanc*'—the White Father.

About this moment of landing Colonel Buckmaster told me: "Mathilde Carré was overjoyed when she stepped

ashore in Britain. She was absolutely triumphant about what had been done—and, of course, it was a considerable feat.”

Just how triumphant The Cat really was can be judged from the entry in her own memoirs about this moment of arrival. After describing her adventures on her Channel crossing, Madame Carré ends her memoirs on the following lyrical and self-satisfied note:

“And on this clear and magnificent morning, I saw the coast of England appear, all pink and glistening in the morning sunshine.

“And if, from the darkness of his cell, one man, Roman (Armand), could have seen me, he would surely have smiled his good smile and he would have said simply, ‘I always had confidence in her—and I knew that a little Cat could pass anywhere she wished.’ ”

It was not Colonel Buckmaster, but others of those concerned, who told me enough about the events which immediately followed to enable me to construct at least a partial picture, within the limits of military security, of what happened to The Cat during her brief period of liberty in wartime Britain.

On the journey up to London the party stopped at Paignton for lunch and Colonel Buckmaster telephoned his office to announce the arrival of The Cat and to lay on extensive preparations to receive her.

For, before leaving Dartmouth, Lucas had privately taken Colonel Buckmaster aside and given him a warning that Madame Carré had played the role of a double agent. So Colonel Buckmaster took prompt precautions. An A.T.S. girl in civilian clothes was allotted the role—a somewhat unwelcome one as it proved to be—of acting as a kind of ‘hostess’ to The Cat. She was sent round the corner from the Baker Street offices of The Firm to Selfridges to buy all that a woman might immediately need

on arriving in wartime London without luggage. Thus, it was this great Oxford Street store which unwittingly supplied the creature comforts for the woman spy who came to London—bedroom slippers, a nightdress, under-wear, soap, toothpaste and even a box of face powder.

The warnings about The Cat which were sent to London by Lucas's brother, by Benny and, via the Americans, by Maitre Brault, did not reach Britain until after her arrival there. So it was from Lucas himself that the three departments concerned—the French Section of S.O.E., the Intelligence Service of the War Office and the Polish Section—heard of the activities of Madame Carré in Paris and her links with the Gestapo.

And because, initially, the British thought it best to keep up the pretence of accepting Mathilde Carré at her face value as a trusted British agent, a pleasant flat was put at her disposal on the third floor of Porchester Gate in Bayswater Road. It had a hall, large lounge, large bedroom and a smaller one, modern bathroom and kitchen, and overlooked Hyde Park. The flat was also, in the words of one of those who described these matters to me, 'lousy with microphones.'

But the flat, and in particular the microphones, were not completely prepared on that day, February 27, 1942, on which The Cat and Colonel Buckmaster and the White Father arrived in London after the journey up from Dartmouth. So Mathilde Carré dined and slept that first night in the flat of one of the members of The Firm. It was a good dinner, with good French wine and liqueurs, and The Cat talked with wit and high excitement of all those of her recent adventures which fitted in with her reassumed role of a loyal member of the French Resistance.

Next day she had her first glimpse of London, as she was escorted around the town by her officially appointed friend from the A.T.S. whom, for the purpose of this narrative, we may call Valerie. She was an experienced and

able woman, who spoke French fluently and who did great wartime services of which the public has never heard and, such is her modesty, probably never will.

It was Valerie anyway who saw The Cat safely installed in her flat in Porchester Gate. There was a slight contretemps on the day she moved in, for as the two women arrived in the hall of the apartment Valerie saw with dismay that a member of the British security services, disguised as a house electrician and mounted on a ladder, was even at that moment still engaged in completing the installation of one of the microphones. Hastily Valerie called to him, "Haven't you finished fixing those lights yet?"—and invited Mathilde Carré downstairs to take a cup of coffee while the lamentably slow-working 'electrician' completed his task.

One of the men concerned in these matters at the time told me: "We had one microphone installed in the telephone—and every time the phone rang it nearly blew off the ears of the security man who was listening in." But he added appreciatively, "Nobody minded the job really, you know, because some of the things we heard which went on in that flat were pretty fruity."

So, with The Cat safely installed in her London flat, her period of interrogation by the British authorities could begin. A special intelligence officer was assigned to this task, a large and genial-looking man with a paternal air and a considerable personal knowledge of France, since he had worked there in an official capacity for many years before the war. The long sessions of question and answer were conducted in Mathilde Carré's own apartment and elsewhere, but she was never allowed to visit the Baker Street headquarters of The Firm, for nobody was taking any risks with her.

How useful was the information which The Cat actually gave to the British at this moment? Only British Intelligence itself could properly answer that. Her defence

lawyer at her subsequent trial, Maitre Naud, told me: "Madame Carré took to London with her a complete German radio code with which the British were able to work with Germans for six weeks or so, sending false information back to Bleicher in her name. That at least must have been useful to them."

A former very senior official of The Firm said: "Mathilde Carré told us about morale in France, about Bleicher, of course, and about the methods of work of the German security services, their methods of arrest and interrogation, and a lot of information about posts occupied by different Germans."

From Lucas at the same time, the British obtained a sample of the ration card which was about to be printed in France with the date on which it was to be enforced. This had been obtained by one of Lucas's agents.

And from the other side, after the war, there came a testimony which would seem to indicate that, once she had cast in her lot with the British, Mathilde Carré did in fact serve her newly-regained Allies with at least temporary loyalty. For after the war, in an interview given in Hanover to a correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, Captain Erich Borchers, who in the meantime had become a commercial traveller in surgical bandages and a free-lance journalist, spoke briefly of those days when his one-time protégée went over to the enemy camp. "When we sent *The Cat* to London," Borchers was quoted as saying, "we had every confidence in her. We thought she was reliable enough to be infiltrated into the British Intelligence departments in London, where she could spy for us. But it was not long before we discovered we had been tricked.\*

\* In fact, though the Germans may have grown suspicious of *The Cat*, they never knew for certain whether they had been tricked. It was Benny Cowburn who told me how, after the war, he encountered Bleicher in the witness room of a Paris court where they were both giving evidence. Bleicher had asked him: "Tell me, *The Cat*—was she really double-crossing us or not?"

In all the weeks that messages in her name were coming from London, we received only silly and insignificant information. She kept on apologising for not being able to supply us with vital military information. She sent us coded messages which usually said nothing more than 'arrived safely' or 'am leaving to attend a special training course which takes up most of my time'."

And Herr Borchers added: "Looking back now, it is my firm conviction that The Cat entered British territory only to avoid working for us. But exactly what happened is still one of the riddles of the war."

However that may be, apart from giving the British authorities what information she could, Mathilde Carré happily made hay while the sun shone during the brief period of her liberty in London. The major blitzes on the capital were over, and Mathilde Carré, eager and energetic, wanted to go everywhere and see everything, and exploit her strange new situation for all it might be worth. The crowds who thronged Piccadilly and Knightsbridge, the Berkeley Buttery and the smart French restaurants such as the Ecu de France would have been highly astonished had they known that the small and lively Frenchwoman who went about everywhere in the company of her English friend (Valerie of the A.T.S.) had only a month before been sharing a flat in Paris with a member of the German *Abwehr* and had been sent to London on a personal mission by him.

"She wanted to go to all the smart places," said one of those who knew Mathilde Carré at this time. "And she fancied herself in the role of a 'Grande Dame'. She went to the dentist's, to the hairdresser's, to beauty parlours and to dress shops. She had, to be sure, a certain talent for clothes—a certain chic—and she was the sort of person who could mix in any kind of society."

Once, wandering through Harvey Nichols' department store, Mathilde Carré saw a black velvet neckband with a

crimson flower sewn on to it and insisted on buying two, one for herself and one for Valerie who was with her. "I've still got it even today," Valerie told me. "But it's a rather macabre looking thing." Undoubtedly The Cat had a taste for the macabre, for one of her other cherished possessions was a belt which was hung round with dozens of little skeletons.

During all the time that she was free in London, The Cat was never once left unobserved. Security men were attached to her flat both day and night, and when she was out in the streets the familiar figure of a brawny detective in a long, belted mackintosh was never far away. The Cat herself did not resent this guard; indeed she welcomed it. One of her chief fears in London apparently was that she would be recognised by some former associate of Armand's who would be able to tell the British all she had really done and might, perhaps, seek personal revenge on her. No doubt it was with such a possibility in mind that on one occasion The Cat said to one of her British friends: "You people over here have really no idea how things are in occupied France. It's such a strange atmosphere over there—so many untrue things are said about people—even quite loyal people, too."

And, indeed, once her haunting fear that she would be recognised did, in fact, come true. The Cat was lunching with a British woman 'companion' in the Châteaubriand restaurant of the Mayfair Hotel. Her companion noticed that she suddenly became restless and seemed ill at ease. "I don't feel too well," she suddenly said. "I think I will go to the cloakroom." Even on such occasions as visits to hotel cloakrooms The Cat was never left unaccompanied, so the inevitable woman friend went along too, to make sure she was not going to try to communicate secretly with anybody.

When The Cat came back to the restaurant, she insisted on changing her chair at the table so that she had her

back to the main part of the room; But just as she was sitting down a man at another table saw her—and instantly recognised her. It was a Pole, a former friend of Armand, it appeared. There was a violent quarrel under the eyes of the guests lunching in the restaurant, who certainly had no idea what it was all about. At one moment the Pole seemed to be threatening Mathilde Carré with physical violence. But before any such thing could happen the British woman who was with her hustled her quickly out of the restaurant and into a hastily summoned taxi-cab.

The watch kept on The Cat was very careful. She was never given a chance to make a telephone call from anywhere outside her own flat. She was never allowed to buy a stamp or post a letter, though she several times expressed a wish to write to her brother. "He's the only one who really cares about me," she would explain.

There was one other occasion on which The Cat came near to being recognised in London—near, indeed, to having her presence in Britain quite publicly revealed.

One evening, after a long-drawn-out conference about what false messages were to be sent back by radio (for Bleicher's edification) to Lucas's assistant, Roger, Lucas, Madame Carré and a Scotland Yard Inspector went for a drink to that resort known to so many soldiers on leave and civilians seeking oblivion from the anxieties of wartime London of that period, the Suivi night club, where the lights were low and the music was soft and sweet. With them that evening was also Major Boddington from the Channel crossing, the '*Père Blanc*'. As the party was sitting at a comfortable corner table there suddenly appeared in the doorway a group of tough, square-shouldered men who looked, as it was subsequently described to me, 'like a rugby football scrum in plain clothes'. One of the men came over to the table where The Cat was sitting and said civilly but commandingly, "Come now, let's get this

over quickly, just give me your full name and address, please."

With some dismay the British members of the party realised that what was now happening was a manifestation of one aspect of the 'British way of life' of which their French guests had probably never heard—a police raid on a night club. And naturally neither Lucas nor The Cat had any identity papers whatever. If their names and addresses were taken it might lead to charges at Bow Street and all kinds of highly undesirable publicity. Quickly the Major demanded to see the Police Inspector in charge of the raid. "Sorry," he told the Inspector. "You can't have the names of any of my party except one—and perhaps that one will mean something to you. Have you ever heard of Inspector Gale? Well, he is a member of our party and he is here on duty. See what I mean? So don't you think you'd better call off your dogs, at least from that table?" The Inspector took the hint—and the fact that a former woman agent of the German *Abwehr* was an interested witness of a police raid on a London night club remained just another minor secret of the war.

And so the days of The Cat in London continued. She was in her flat at Porchester Gate when, early in March, she heard the news that the R.A.F. had made their first major raid on Paris, attacking factories producing tanks for the Germans at Boulogne-Billancourt. And she was there too, when, in conditions of great secrecy, Lucas returned to France for fresh, and intensely dangerous re-organisation work. To allay the suspicions of Bleicher at the moment of his departure, a message was radioed to Roger in Paris stating that Lucas would be absent from London for a while because he was leaving for a course of training in Scotland.

The British continued to watch Madame Carré's movements hoping, no doubt, that sooner or later she would seek to make contact with some agent of Bleicher in Lon-

don and thus would betray to them any contacts which the Germans might still retain in Britain. But, as far as could be seen, The Cat made no such moves. Either she was being extremely cautious or Bleicher had not provided her with any names of *Abwehr* agents in London, probably, indeed, because he had none to provide.

There was only one slight mystery about The Cat's activities at this time. She had taken with her from France, as one of the few possessions that went with her on her journey, the famous bright red hat which she had worn so regularly in Paris. She was always wanting to wear this red hat while she was out in the streets of London and she was so insistent about it that those who were keeping watch on her wondered at one time whether the hat itself could have been intended as a signal to some unknown person who might be seeking to contact her.

As time went on The Cat became increasingly resentful of the constant supervision to which she was subjected. She told Valerie one day: "I don't feel that I am really liked or trusted over here—yet I have told you everything I know and done everything I can to help."

But British security officers were becoming equally concerned over the risks which they considered were being taken through allowing The Cat to remain even in that form of supervised liberty which she had been enjoying. Besides, she was monopolising the attention of security guards who were badly needed for other work.

And then, finally, a shattering piece of news came to London from occupied France: Lucas had been arrested. Only twenty-five days after Lucas had secretly landed in France one of his agents had been arrested while crossing the demarcation line. Papers found on this man had been taken to Bleicher, and they revealed to him that Lucas was in France though no advice of his return had been sent to Roger Cottin through the German controlled radio. Something had gone wrong with his plans. Bleicher

promptly arrested Roger Cottin whom he knew where to find. Though Cottin refused to talk, another agent was not so strong-minded and Lucas was located and arrested.

When Bleicher interviewed Lucas after his arrest, his first words to him were, "I've been betrayed."

"Not at all," said Lucas. "If anyone has been betrayed by The Cat it's me." And throughout his talk with Bleicher Lucas encouraged the German to believe that The Cat was still faithfully acting as his agent in London in accordance with her promise to him. And it seems that, right until after the war, Bleicher still believed this.

In his subsequent interrogations in prison Lucas had four of his front teeth knocked out by inquisitors less subtle than Bleicher. He spent nine months of solitary confinement in Fresnes and the rest of the war in Colditz officers' prison camp. But he never told the Germans about how Bleicher's plan for introducing The Cat to Britain as a German agent had broken down. At the end of the war the indomitable Lucas was liberated and lived to become once more a successful business man in Paris, with an attractive wife and a comfortable flat in the West End of Paris. Roger Cottin, too, survived. Like Lucas he was imprisoned for the rest of the war, but finally was liberated and lived to set himself up in business somewhere in the New World.

But at the moment of Lucas's arrest the British, of course, had no way of knowing whether he had told Bleicher of how The Cat had acted after her arrival in London. Thus there seemed now little point in allowing this troublesome and expensive visitor to remain any longer at liberty. There also seemed now little hope that some German agent in Britain would try to contact The Cat and thus reveal his identity to the British.

So in the early spring of 1942 there was a special conference held at the War Office, which Colonel Buckmaster

attended, to consider what was to be done with The Cat. And without a great deal of disagreement among the officers present the decision was taken: The Cat had better be put out of further harm's way.

And so it was that two burly plain-clothes men appeared one day at her flat and invited Mathilde Carré to accompany them without resistance or delay.

The Cat, so I was told, was both astonished and furious when she was arrested—and, said my informant, "Mathilde Carré in a temper was not a pretty sight." But despite her protests she was taken off in a plain van and safely lodged in Holloway jail where, it was stated, she proved to be 'a very troublesome prisoner'. Part of her time in Holloway jail she spent writing some letters described as 'bitterly reproachful' to Colonel Buckmaster, whom she accused of having failed to appreciate the loyal services which she had rendered him. And to one of those who subsequently saw her The Cat confided: "I'd like to kill that man."

Later Mathilde Carré was transferred to Aylesbury, while a series of high-level conferences was held in London to decide on what should finally be done with her. At one time there was apparently even a suggestion that she should be tried for treason before a British court, in which event she might have ended her life by being executed in Britain.

But more moderate counsels prevailed and the remaining years of the war passed by peacefully for Mathilde Carré in the orderly life of Aylesbury prison, where she had more than enough time at her disposal to complete the written record of her own strange adventures.

Only when the war was over was Mathilde Carré finally allowed to make that journey back to France on which Bleicher had once so hopefully counted. But instead of being parachuted by the trusting British back to

German-occupied territory at the height of the war, The Cat at last made the journey home in an ordinary passenger Channel boat, escorted by two Scotland Yard men who obtained a signed receipt for her from the French Police to whom they handed her over when she reached Boulogne.

## CHAPTER 16

### “Memoirs of a Cat”

FOR many weeks and months while she was in prison The Cat worked on her memoirs. The book was a project which she had considered intermittently all through the period of her fantastic adventures. Perhaps she had hoped that, after the war, this strange document could be published. But it never was. First impounded by British officials, it was later handed over to the French authorities for inclusion among the papers used at The Cat's trial, where portions of it were read out in court by the prosecution. Apart from the extracts quoted from this document by the Abbé Guillaume, the only considerable portion of the book which has ever appeared in print, I believe, was the strange, almost mystical, opening passage which appeared at the time of The Cat's trial in the Paris newspaper *France-Dimanche*, with whose permission it is quoted here.

So it was that, ‘somewhere in London’, Mathilde Carré sat down at a table and put at the top of a sheet of paper her opening words: ‘The Memoirs of a Cat—London, April 6, 1942’. And, as she retraced step by step in her mind the course of her fantastic experiences, there seems to have passed before her the vision of all those whose lives she had so profoundly affected, and in some cases ended. And they were peculiar words indeed which she now proceeded to write:

All you who have loved me and now are dead or in prison or separated from me, I am going to write all

this very near you, for you have been me and I have been you, and we have not parted from one another.

Love is no longer in my soul, love has remained with you; and do not be jealous of my life. You are so much more with me than all the living people who surround me at this moment. Although the sun is shining, although they have given me every comfort and they try to give me affection and to understand me. You who fall asleep unquiet about my anxieties —you are not sleeping tonight.

I have suffered so much. I do not know how to find words to express this profound and infinite pain, all this agony. I have reacted, and I do not want to suffer any longer. I am not alone, because I have 'our world'. I can withdraw myself into it and continue to live with you.

There still exists in me this animal pleasure of the body which my soul despairs yet which I desire, but harmony is no more—and love remains with you.

Each morning seems to me heavy, with the colour of the sky in mourning. You are there no longer, but because you are dead or in prison or separated from me I am faithful to you all and to our ideals.

If one thinks back to all that one did with joy, courage, madness, idealism, high spirits, defying fear and with stupid and magnificent pride, and if one thinks of the meanness of men, it is more pure to die—and to die quickly.

Each of you went out of my life one day, in so many different ways. You were serious, brave, tender, amused, conquered, wounded, disgusted, intoxicated or loving . . . and my life closes down around all your dear faces and my dreams guard you on their wings.

I was yours and you were mine. We had our secrets, our languages, my frankness to which you responded, we had our scruples and nevertheless everything was

permitted to us without remorse and without regret... You were my innocence and my vice, my efforts and my power, and who knew me better than you. . . . Oh, All of You who have loved me. . . .

In writing these very strange lines was Mathilde Carré genuinely moved by pangs of conscience at the thought of those who had been her victims or was she, lonely in London, merely suffering from a momentary depression to which she so oddly gave voice? Was this hypocrisy, self-dramatisation, or remorse? Who can say? Yet the fact remains that within a few pages of the beginning of her memoirs she is writing once again with wholly characteristic self-confidence, self-esteem and apparent total lack of moral misgivings. In the only remaining passage of her memoirs published by the Paris paper, Mathilde Carré recounts just what happened in Algeria in the days after she had finally seen her husband off to his military service and was herself bound for her new life in France. This part of her memoirs dealt with the period of September 1940 and she tells how, after saying good-bye to her husband in Oran, she went on to catch the boat from Algiers:

Algiers was grey. I was glum. I let two Arabs carry my bags and take me to the Hotel Terminus, where I installed myself. But when I went to take a bath there was an insect at the bottom of the bath and I rang for the chambermaid. It was a bug. . . .

I met some people whom I didn't like and I was obliged to accept an invitation which quite frankly I completely forgot. That was the fault of a child parachutist; in the black-out he mistook me for a midinette of his own age—which was quite charming. He was a real urchin from Paris, happy because he was going back to France. I put on a bit of an accent and for him the illusion was perfect. We sat

on a bench and he said such pretty little things to me, so tender that I thought how charming was the heart of a Paris urchin. And when he saw under the lights of a café who was the ragamuffin young girl he had been courting, I tried with infinite gentleness to take away all his confusion and I invited him to lunch next day. And this idyll, infinitely charming and pure, was to continue until my departure.

I returned to France on a mail-boat reserved for parachute troops returning to their base at Istres. The commandant of the troops grumbled because this woman refused to take part in the boat drill on the deck: it was some kind of a make-believe with life-belts. In the end I agreed to join in, thanks to a charming captain and a nice lieutenant. And then there was the usual kind of crossing, with flirting and bridge. And the child parachutist was also on board.

And at this point the published memoirs of Mathilde Carré somewhat mysteriously came to an end. The articles were never continued in *France-Dimanche*, so that it appeared rather as though some higher authority had suggested that it would be preferable that the excessively frank account by The Cat of her own adventures would be better kept quietly in the official archives of France.

But it was on this book, said to have run to more pages than an average novel, that Mathilde Carré worked steadily during her long period of captivity in Britain. Day after day as she sat in confinement she re-lived the hectic and stimulating excitements of her so recent past.

When extracts from this book came to be read in court, they undoubtedly did Mathilde Carré incalculable harm, for some of the passages displayed a revolting degree of cynicism and inhumanity with regard to the many former friends whom she had betrayed. Why The Cat chose to write in such terms remains a mystery. Her enemies would

suggest that the book is a revelation of a perverse character. Her defenders, such as her own lawyer, Maitre Naud, would urge that Mathilde Carré put on a pretence of hard-heartedness merely out of a desire to *épater le bourgeois*, as a reckless gesture of defiance by a basically sensitive person against a hostile world. The true motives behind the *Memoirs of a Cat* are likely long to remain a mystery.

## CHAPTER 17

### “What Else Could I Do?”

**A**LTOGETHER The Cat was kept in prison, first in Britain and then in France, for nearly seven years before she finally went for trial in Paris. But even those years of captivity and seclusion seemed, outwardly at least, to have done singularly little to break her spirit. In her French prisons, both at Rennes and in La Santé, she worked steadily and without betraying any undue anxiety or remorse at the preparation of her defence. She shrewdly chose as her counsel one of the top barristers of Paris, Maitre Albert Naud—who had himself spent part of the war in prison because of his own Resistance activities with a group known as the '*Musée de l'Homme*'. And she maintained with Maitre Naud a stream of letters making suggestions about witnesses who might be of service to her cause, and putting forward arguments which he might usefully raise in her defence.

In his long and painstaking preparation for the trial, Maitre Naud contacted all those whom he could locate who might possibly be able to give useful testimony on Mathilde Carré's behalf. He applied, with success, to the Deuxième Bureau of Vichy, who promised that, despite the natural reluctance of any Secret Service to allow its members to appear in public, those whom The Cat had usefully served would be allowed to go to court and say so. He sought, too, from the British authorities an opinion on The Cat, hoping, no doubt, that at least some member of the British Intelligence Service could be found who would testify to the fact that after her arrival in Britain Madame

ca 1.5.48

cher Père, je vous remercie de cette lettre du 2.4.48, letter  
bien intéressante!

- J'ai été un peu... envoi en biant l'officier britannique  
à un sujet. J'en ai le pasteur et amis, a pris un avion  
de tout ce et m'a déclaré "le principal est qu'ils ne connaissent  
pas leurs révélations! mais étant donné que de l'expérience avec  
le français ils sont bons, Euro, sans en faire, ils peuvent  
sûrement faire déclarer un officier!" évidemment....

D'autre part quand on déclare quelqu'un "évidemment  
suspect" il faut se faire avancer des preuves sur rapport de femme  
femme, mais appuyé par des faits, non faits et si je peux!  
Les Américains ont jamais fait de femmes suspectes sur un  
point, car j'ai toujours été de bonne foi avec Euro. (ouais!) -  
Dans d'autres cas, dans des domaines, par exemple j'ai trouvé une  
femme suspecte : mariée avec un officier et a été trouvée  
en train de flirter avec plusieurs hommes membres de  
l'ambassade américaine à l'ambassade de l'URSS,  
en septembre 1946.

J'ai été aussi suspecté par Euro que lesquels ont veulent raffraîchir  
sur les dernières femmes qui m'accusent d'avoir aidé Blücher.  
C'est sûrement tout.

- Etant donné que l'I. S. a accepté que AKERAND fournisse  
une attestation, qu'il y a précédent, elle ne peut plus  
refuser que l'on demande les attestations suivantes:

- COLONEL RUCKMASTER.
- MAJOR TOM GREEN.
- MAJOR CROWDER
- Infatuer GALE

et surtout que l'on demande au représentant de l'I. S. de  
l'envoyer en un.

... que l'affaire passant à M. RECOGNÉE sur les deux juges  
en cette matière ...

Avez-vous la visite du général d'Artillerie de la Vigne ?

Avez-vous une réponse de votre Caporal J. LANDAU ?

Quand ~~avez-vous~~ passez-vous ? environs.

Combien a-t-elle au moment de tout, en venant vers  
vous (sansoublier votre hiver !) renseignant, marquer,  
me laisser pas dans l'incertitude et l'ignorance, bref faire ?!

Avec tous ces renseignements, cher Maître, je resterai  
heureux.

By Pierre —

Carré had given them much both about the German *Abwehr* and about conditions of life in occupied France.

But here he was disappointed. Of all those who had been in contact with The Cat in London—some of them very intimately indeed—not one British witness was found to speak up on her behalf. Back from London to Maitre Naud came only a cold official reply that, while Madame Carré had indeed passed on certain information to the British authorities, she had, as a person, always been considered by them as 'eminently suspect'.

When, early in the spring of 1948 Maitre Naud passed on this reply to The Cat in her prison, it brought from her a characteristically caustic retort. In a letter written in green ink on a sheet of lined paper torn from a school exercise book and dated May 1st, Mathilde Carré wrote:

Dear Maitre, I thank you for your letter of 27.4.48 which was very interesting!

I was a little . . . annoyed on reading the opinion which the British gave of me. At that moment, the pastor arrived, took note of all that and said to me, “The chief thing is that they recognise the services rendered! But in view of the fact that, in agreement with the French, they themselves kept you three years in prison, they cannot now suddenly declare that you are magnificent!” Of course . . . on the other hand when you declare somebody to be ‘eminently suspect’ you ought not to put that forward like a bit of washerwoman’s gossip, but support it with facts *unless there are no facts!* The English have never been able to find me suspect on any point, for I have always been of good faith with them; 100%!—In other cases mentioned in the dossiers, for example, I found this an instance of a suspect woman: somebody who formed a tie with officers and was caught in the process of photographing the latest model of a bomber arriving from America on the aerodrome of Boran in September 1944.

I could not have been suspect for them, except when they sought support from the French dossiers accusing me of having aided Bleicher. That is absolutely all.

Seeing that the I.S. (*Intelligence Service*) have agreed that Armand should furnish a testimony and that there is this precedent, they can no longer refuse you if you ask for the following testimonies:

Colonel Buckmaster,

Major Tom Green,

Major Cowburn,

Inspector Gale,

and above all that you ask for a representative of the I.S. to attend the trial.

As for the affair of M. Becognée (*the official prosecutor in the case*) you are the only judge in that matter.

Have you had the visit of General d'Astier de la Vigerie?

Have you had a reply from your colleague S. Landau?

When is the case coming up? About.

Go on keeping me informed about everything by coming to see me (not forgetting to bring me a copy of your book) or by writing to me, but for pity's sake do not leave me in uncertainty or ignorance!

With all my thanks, dear Maitre, and my best regards,

M. CARRÉ

Obviously Mathilde Carré was putting all that pent-up energy which she had once devoted to espionage into the preparation of her defence, and dutifully Maitre Naud followed up each new line of investigation suggested by her to him. But nothing ever came from the British side and no testimony was received either from Armand, who presumably was similarly dissuaded from speaking by his advisers in Britain.

Another of the leading figures who was absent from the court when the trial took place was Bleicher himself, and his absence too remained something of a mystery. It was stated that, not long before the trial, he had moved from his place of residence in the French zone of occupied Germany, whence he could, presumably, have been summoned by the French authorities, to Hamburg where, being in the British zone, he was beyond the reach of the French courts. So not only was the court informed on the first day of the trial that Hugo Bleicher would not be appearing as a witness, but it was also stated that, in accordance with a request from Maitre Naud, the written declaration he had made to the French authorities while

he was under arrest at the end of the war would not be entered as evidence during the trial. It seems possible that the French authorities were no more anxious than the British to see in court this *Abwehr* witness who might, under cross-examination, be forced to reveal a mutually embarrassing amount of information.

In the course of her protracted interviews with the examining magistrate, who in French legal procedure prepares the details of the case before it goes to the courts, Mathilde Carré also showed characteristic energy and a power for specious argument which did not always reveal her in the most favourable possible light. Thus on one occasion she was explaining at length that the real purpose of her activities after her arrest had been misunderstood, since, all the time she had been working with Bleicher, she claimed she had in reality been seeking only an opportunity to deceive the Germans. “In order to make that deception possible,” she asserted, “there had to be victims. I was acting as a sort of ‘Battalion leader of the Resistance’ and so I had sometimes to sacrifice men just as a general on a battlefield may send a group of soldiers to their death in order to save a regiment. That is just the fortunes of war.”

“And besides,” this strange woman once confided in a private interview with her defence counsel, “I only denounced the more stupid ones, you know.”

However that may be, and despite the mysteriously long delays in the preparation of Mathilde Carré’s trial, there did at last come that third day of January 1949, when Judge Drappier took his place as President of the Paris Court of Justice and announced the opening of the double trial of Madame Carré known as The Cat and Madame Renée Borni known as ‘Violette’, both of them accused of the crime of ‘intelligence with the enemy’ for which the maximum penalty was death. The actual charges against Madame Carré concerned only 35 of those whom she had

denounced, out of the actual total of 80 or 90 arrested by Bleicher.

So, in the cold light of a January morning, The Cat, so small in size that little more than her head and arms appeared over the top of the dock in the Palais de Justice, at last faced her accusers. Yet even now there was something striking and provocative about her; she was a small, pert and lively figure, well if simply dressed, in a neat black coat and skirt—the coat with a velvet collar—and an immaculately white silk blouse; strangely smart, many spectators thought, for a woman who had spent some seven years in prison awaiting her trial. Her striking appearance was heightened by the generous mass of coarse but sleek dark hair, carefully tended, and brushed in a straight fringe over her forehead in a wholly personal fashion which obviously had nothing to do with the contemporary Parisian hair styles of 1949. The restless movements of her slim hands on the top of the dock showed that she was highly-strung and sensitive: yet the firm chin obviously denoted a strong will, and a sinister glint in those large green eyes, a strain of utter ruthlessness.

Throughout the three-day trial The Cat did herself incalculable harm by her pert manner and her apparently unrepentant air. For one thing, she aroused the immediate hostility of such French newspaper writers as had come there to report the trial. As the representative of the Resistance newspaper *Liberation* sourly wrote on that first day: 'They called her The Cat, but her flat triangular face, her voice of studied sweetness, the whistling notes of her speech and her deceptive calm seemed to make her resemble more a serpent.'

And Madeleine Jacob, the court reporter of *Liberation*, commented: 'Her cynicism had planted on her face a fixed expression of self-satisfied insolence. From under her lowered eyelids her eyes shone hard clear; on her lips there was a vague smile permanently fixed.'

More sympathy among those present that day went out to Renée Borni, who was generally considered to have been more weak than wicked, and who now, seriously ill, appeared in court lying prostrate on a stretcher, her hand reassuringly clasped now and then by her own defence counsel.

Strangely, the case did not obtain widespread publicity in either the French or foreign newspapers of the time. In most countries newsprint was still scarce, and there was a general post-war feeling of scepticism and fatigue about most stories of wartime underground activities. So in Paris a paper like *Figaro* could dismiss the trial in only a few lines, and it was left mainly to the organs closely associated with the Resistance, such as *Liberation* and *Franc Tireur*, to announce the case on their front pages under headlines such as ‘How “The Cat” Became the Mistress of Hugo Bleicher and Sold out her Comrades of the Resistance’ (*Franc Tireur*) and ‘The Widow Carré Dreamed of Being a New Mata Hari’ (*Liberation*).

And so the trial opened with the usher, reversing Christian name and surname in accordance with French official practice, coldly announcing, “Carré, Mathilde, born Belard, aged 39, otherwise known as ‘The Cat.’”

The court first heard in summary the main lines of the story as it has already been told in the foregoing pages. Leaning her chin on her hands above the edge of the dock and always with that faint trace of a smile playing about her lips, The Cat listened in silence to the case against her. It was not until the President of the court reached that part of her story which dealt with the night when she first became the mistress of Hugo Bleicher that Mathilde Carré was first stung into speech.

The judge related that Bleicher, during his hearing by the examining magistrate in the case, had confided that he himself had never experienced any pleasure in his

physical relationships with The Cat, which he carried on, he maintained, 'only in the line of duty'.

Huffily Mathilde Carré interposed: "If Bleicher said that, it was only because I wasn't nice to him."

And Madame Carré became even more irritated when the judge read to the court a long and somewhat complicated analysis of her character which had been prepared for the trial by an official psychiatrist, Dr. Heuyer.

"This is too ridiculous," she exclaimed. "That Dr. Heuyer stayed with me no more than about three minutes. He sat opposite me, looked at me with haggard eyes and asked me about my education and under what doctor I had served at the St. Anne Hospital. When I told him it was Dr. Ombredanne, he pushed back his chair and said, 'Was it interesting?' And when I began to reply he started to leave and said, 'After all, I haven't come here to chat with you like a student.' That was all. This report you've been reading was just made up by Dr. Heuyer after he'd read the case against me."

Later Mathilde Carré complained to the court that during the period of her arrest in Britain she had been prevented from communicating with anybody.

"But I imagine that those people whom you delivered to the Gestapo were somewhat more severely treated?" gently inquired the judge.

"Well," said Madame Carré, with a shrug, "they could very well risk their lives; after all I had to risk mine."

And back the judge came again to the circumstances in which Mathilde Carré had become the mistress of Bleicher.

"Bleicher told me, 'If you don't try any tricks with me you will be free this evening,'" Mathilde Carré told the court. "That's why I didn't try to escape from him."

"But did you need to become his mistress the same evening?" asked the judge.

"Do I have to relate all that in detail?" asked Madame

Carré with an air which seemed to indicate that she was quite prepared to do so if necessary.

“No, no, certainly not,” replied the judge hastily. “But all the same did it not shock you, as the widow of a French officer, to become the mistress of a German sergeant?”

“Well, yes, it did shock me . . . physically, *Monsieur le President.*”

And The Cat continued: “Bleicher had promised me faithfully that at the end of that first day after the arrest of Duvernoy he would take me home. Instead I found that he was taking me in his car out to Maisons Laffitte and he told me, ‘We think it better to keep you with us’. When we got to our destination Bleicher said, ‘Now I will take you up to your room’. He followed me up, suddenly turned the key in the door and announced to me, ‘Now you are my prisoner’.”

The judge: “And so you went to bed with him?”

The Cat: “Well, what else could I have done?”

That phrase was the theme of her defence all that first day. “Bleicher never left me night or day,” she insisted. “There was nothing I could do about it. And in any case our agents made a great mistake in keeping their appointments with me.”

And then the court heard one man at least who spoke up decisively in Mathilde Carré’s favour—Colonel Achard of the Deuxième Bureau of Vichy, whose evidence was taken first because he had to leave the following day on an urgent mission to Indo-China. The Colonel, to the surprise of most of those in court, bluntly described the accused as, in his opinion, “an admirable woman”. He added: “I feel positive that during the time she was working with our services she was not playing a double game. She never betrayed us and yet we would have been a pretty important prize for the Germans.”

But, the judge asked: “Was it not true that at one time Mathilde Carré had, in fact, sent a postcard, and with

the postmark of the German field police, to the Colonel in Vichy asking him to come to Paris, and even offering to go to Vichy herself?"

"But you don't understand," interrupted The Cat from the dock. "That was really an S.O.S. I was sending him."

"What, through the German army post?" asked the judge.

"Yes, that was just it—I did that so that the card should arrive in Vichy more quickly. Besides, the Colonel wasn't really important enough to be of much interest to the Germans."

At this the worthy Colonel, who had come so loyally to give evidence on The Cat's behalf, said no more, but looked slightly ruffled.

Another member of the Vichy Secret Service also testified on her behalf, Commander Simonneau, who asked to be heard in camera, explaining, "There's nothing particularly secret about my evidence, but we are not allowed to render ourselves identifiable to the secret services of foreign countries." Like Colonel Achard, the Commander was understood to have paid tribute to what he termed the 'immense desire' shown by Madame Carré to serve her country.

And finally, for the defence, there was The Cat's own mother, Madame Belard, who, being a relative of the accused, gave her evidence, according to the French custom, without being placed on oath. An emotional figure in the witness-box with a big hat and heavy fur stole, declaiming with a wealth of gesture and sometimes mopping a tear from her eyes, Madame Belard spoke in a way almost too dramatic to win the full sympathy of the court.

"We are an honourable family of France," declared Madame Belard. "How could you imagine that a member of a family such as ours could betray their country? All through the war we had on the wall of our dining-room

a French flag and a portrait of our son in his uniform of a St. Cyr cadet.”

“Which, however,” interrupted the judge dryly, “did not prevent you, Madame, from entertaining to luncheon underneath that flag—Bleicher, the German lover of your daughter.”

“Yes,” protested Madame Belard, “but I insulted Bleicher for more than two hours that day.”

And, as Madame Belard mopped her eyes in obvious distress, the cool Mathilde Carré turned to her counsel, Maitre Naud, and audibly whispered to him, “Just look at Mother: she’s making herself ridiculous.”

And then it was the turn of some of those victims of The Cat who had survived the concentration camps to tell of what they knew.

One of the first was her old childhood friend René Aubertin, back from the concentration camp where he had seen so many people die. Aubertin met Madame Belard as she was leaving the court.

“You must speak up for Micheline,” she pleaded. “She did what she could to save you all and now only you can save her.”

Sadly Aubertin replied: “I’m afraid, Madame Belard, that I must tell the truth.”

And Aubertin, with tears welling up in his eyes, told the court of a solemn promise he had made during the dreadful days of the concentration camp. “I promised my comrades at Mathausen,” he said, “that if I came back here alive I would testify truly but without hatred. And the truth is that Micheline preferred her own life to that of thirty-five other people.”

Without an outward trace of emotion, The Cat listened to Aubertin as he recounted the terrible sufferings undergone by some of her victims.

“Think of the Hugentoblers,” he said, turning towards her. “They were among your first victims, and yet

Madame Hugentobler was so devoted to you that she would willingly have cleaned your shoes. And think of little Paul de Rocquigny, who really loved you. When he got to Mathausen he was so small and weak that he became the whipping-boy of all the Gestapo guards and he was literally beaten to death."

The Cat said nothing, hardly seemed to be listening to Aubertin at all. And Aubertin related that, on the day of Paul's arrest The Cat first went to him and planted on him a bunch of compromising documents. Then she came back again with Bleicher, who thus 'found' the necessary evidence against de Rocquigny. "And thus you marked him down for massacre," added Aubertin.

Sometimes the court gasped at The Cat's apparently off-hand and cynical replies.

Once, when Aubertin was relating a particular incident, he recalled that The Cat had often changed the colour of her hair. "On that special day," he said, "I think your hair was brick red."

"No," interrupted The Cat emphatically. "It wasn't at all brick red: it was a very nice auburn colour."

Then came a long procession of the victims of The Cat: first Mireille Lejeune, now a widow since the death of her policeman husband in Mathausen.

"When Micheline came along with Bleicher on that day of our arrest," she recalled, "she introduced Bleicher to me with a friendly smile and all she said was, 'Look, here's my new lover'."

There came Wladimir Lipsky, too, a sick and broken figure after his long imprisonment. As he passed Mathilde Carré in the dock she smiled up brightly at him, "You know I always had a good opinion of you," she told him. And with a trace of irony in his voice Lipsky replied, "Well, look where your good opinion landed me."

There was Passagez, the railway man, who told the court how he had been terribly beaten up after his arrest

and how he considered that it was without doubt The Cat who had denounced him.

Defiantly Mathilde Carré snapped at him from the dock: “I never bothered much about you—you were never important enough.”

Another former member of Armand’s group, Jean Dupré, told the court how, when he was taken to the Hotel Edouard VII for interrogation, he had seen Mathilde Carré waiting there in the hall and, believing that she was still a loyal member of the Resistance, had maintained to Bleicher that he had never seen her before. “What?” Madame Carré had shouted at him. “Never seen me before? Of course you have.” And, turning to the Germans, she had coldly said, “That’s him all right: you can carry on.”

One after another stories of this sort told by witnesses made it clear to the court that The Cat had done much more than merely acquiesce in actions beyond her control taken by the Germans. There was the businessman ‘Yole’ to tell again the story of how he had been tricked by Madame Carré’s bandaged hand into giving her written evidence against himself, which led to his immediate arrest by Bleicher. There was another former agent of Inter-Allied named Schulfort who related that The Cat had arranged a meeting with him in a café, where Bleicher, unknown to him, was sitting listening at a nearby table. Schulfort said he spoke to The Cat in a discreet whisper. “What’s that?” said The Cat. “I can’t hear you, speak up a bit please.” So Bleicher was able to hear what he said, and a few moments later he was arrested.

And there was Maitre Brault, ‘Miklos’, too, to tell of his unfortunate introduction of Lucas to The Cat. “I should have done better to have broken my arm than to do what I did,” said Maitre Brault. “I think that woman had dreams of becoming a second Mata Hari—either a French one or a German one, it didn’t really matter to her.”

One young woman witness, Madame le Bordet, told how she had been literally arrested by The Cat, whom she had seen dining in a restaurant with a man who later turned out to be Bleicher. "Do wait for me," the Cat had told her. "My friend will be going before long." So Madame le Bordet had sat on in the restaurant and finally Bleicher had come up to her table, said quietly, '*Police Allemande*', and taken her away.

But not all the witnesses against The Cat that day were people who had worked loyally for France and not all the evidence was on a tone of high dignity. There was, for instance, Henri Tabet, who once had been a wireless operator of Inter-Allied, had been arrested and then had worked the same radio for Bleicher. "Yes," he told the court, "I was on very intimate terms with Micheline indeed."

From the box Madame Carré protested: "That's not true. I never went to bed with members of the organisation."

"That's a bit much," snapped back Tabet. "If you had had a beauty-spot anywhere I would have been able to say where it was—but you didn't have, and that's a fact."

"I did have—I did have!" almost shouted The Cat.

So, one by one, the witnesses came and told their stories and went, each one building up a little more the dream-like picture of events which now seemed so remote and almost unbelievable. And through the days of testimony, Mathilde Carré peered over the top of the dock and smiled and smiled, and pertly challenged, and seemed hardly at all like a woman with every reason to expect an imminent sentence of death.

## CHAPTER 18

### The Price of Treason

AND now there came into the witness box the one man who, apart from the missing Bleicher, could undoubtedly, if he wished, tell the court more about the real Mathilde Carré than anybody else concerned with the case, 'Lucas'. He had trusted The Cat; to what extent would he now declare that his confidence had been misplaced?

Lucas stepped forward, a neat, quiet figure. Carefully weighing his words, he told in a precise, factual way of how he had been parachuted into France on May 11, 1941, had lost his wireless operator, had been introduced to The Cat by Maitre Brault, and of how she had finally confessed to him that she was working for the Germans.

"On learning this," said de Vomecourt, "I had a moment of hesitation. I could have 'liquidated' Mathilde Carré but I knew that she had a rendezvous with Bleicher two hours later. That would have given me time to escape myself, but not enough time to warn my agents, whose whereabouts were already known to Bleicher. That was why I had the idea of hoodwinking Bleicher by suggesting that it would be in his own interest to allow me to return to England with Mathilde Carré."

Maitre Naud asked Lucas: "Would you say that, at the moment when she confessed to you her liaison with the Germans, Mathilde Carré manifested signs of a sincere desire to make amends?"

There was a momentary pause in court as Lucas

pondered his reply. He must have remembered what he had been told of The Cat's betrayals, and he must have also thought back in a flash to that dramatic moment after dinner on a cold January night when The Cat had first confessed to him her association with Bleicher. He must have recalled the excitements of their subsequent plotting together, the mutually-shared hardships of their embarkation to Britain, which The Cat had uncomplainingly endured. And, pondering these things, Lucas, fair-minded and judicial, told the court, "Yes, on the whole I would."

But he made it clear, all the same, that The Cat had not told him of her association with Bleicher until after the moment when his own suspicions had been aroused. He agreed, too, that even after deciding to use Madame Carré to hoodwink Bleicher, he had still continued to entertain some doubts about her and had, for instance, not told her about the 'parallel' organisation which he was forming alongside the one which he knew had already been discovered by the Germans.

There was really nothing equivocal about Lucas's evidence in so far as it concerned The Cat. What it boiled down to was this; that whatever she may have done before he met her, whatever may have been the charges against her regarding her betrayal of the Inter-Allied network, The Cat had, to the best of his belief, never done anything to harm Lucas himself after she had confessed to him, and had co-operated loyally with him during the actual period of their association. And this evidence he maintained in the face of a harrying attack by the Public Prosecutor.

And now, the witnesses having been heard, it was the turn of the Public Prosecutor, M. Becognée, to put to the court the case against The Cat—and to demand in the name of her victims the penalty of death. And what, at this moment, did the astonishing little woman in the dock choose to do, under the disapproving eye of the five men

and one woman who constituted the jury? Calmly and with that provocative smile still playing on her lips, she produced from her pocket a stick of chewing-gum, unwrapped the paper, put the gum in her mouth and continued nonchalantly to munch it throughout the damning speech of the Prosecutor.

First, M. Becognée let The Cat condemn herself in the eyes of the jury with her own words. Flourishing his 'dossier', he read to them some of the more cynical extracts from the *Memoirs of a Cat*, including her famous retort to Borchers about her last request if she should be shot. "To have a good dinner, spend the night in bed with a friend—and then hear the Requiem of Mozart," repeated M. Becognée. "What kind of a woman could write a thing like this?"

M. Becognée told the jury: "For more than two months this woman touched the very bottom of the pit of treachery. Her perfidy, her subtlety, the perseverance which she showed in doing evil, her so-called 'Memoirs' of which extracts have been read in this court and which show her as she really is, a brain without a heart—all that, you must judge for yourselves and there surely can be only one result of that judgment.

"This woman betrayed France because she was without any moral feelings, because she was a woman without scruples. After all, she was the Chief and she bore heavy responsibilities."

Referring to those members of Inter-Allied who had 'collaborated' after their arrest and were at that time in prison awaiting trial themselves, M. Becognée continued: "All those people who are now still in the prison of Fresnes under charges of treason betrayed their country only because their leader, in whom they had confidence, set them the example. Through her, they became criminals. No good that Mathilde Carré may have done in the past should attenuate your verdict. I speak in the name

of all those who were denounced, in the name of the deported and the dead and of all those who suffered through this woman's perfidy."

And so the Prosecutor came to the final words of his appeal: "I ask that this court should take heed now," said the stern voice, "of the ruthless rapidity with which The Cat betrayed her friends. Think of those who today lie dead through her responsibility—and hers alone. You will be told, no doubt, that this woman also did sterling work for the Allied Resistance—but of all that, I myself can take no account. She betrayed her cause in a manner which I can find no words to pardon, for she herself was the Chief. It is with a heavy heart that I now ask you to punish this woman with the supreme penalty for traitors—with the penalty of death."

Her elbows resting on the hard wooden edge of the dock and her dark head supported on her hands, The Cat listened to these words in silence, with no indication of her private thoughts and, indeed, even with the trace of a slightly sinister smile still playing on her lips.

'No words to pardon' could be found for what she had done. Yet—the court's own records showed it—there had been occasions, not so many years ago, when The Cat had been acclaimed as a heroine and a patriot. She had won mention in French military despatches: the British War Office had sent her organisation, in the peril of occupied France, congratulations and thanks for the services rendered to the Allies in the earliest day of the fight against the Nazis. She had gained the respect and confidence of hundreds of people at all levels of life, and she had won, this small and unspectacular woman, physical love, passionate and devoted, from a whole series of the men who had played the major roles in her adventures.

Now, without a trace of emotion as the demand for her death was made, The Cat went on stolidly munching her chewing-gum. It was obvious that the Prosecutor's speech

had made a very great impression on the jury. But all that Mathilde Carré herself did was to lean forward with a half smile and say in an audible whisper to her defence counsel, Maitre Naud: "Strange, isn't it, that they accuse me now of being insensitive when, all the time I was a young girl, from the age of five, I was always being injected with all kinds of drugs against hyper-sensitivity!"

Maitre Naud motioned to her to be quiet, and then rose to make his plea—obviously against great odds—for the court to show mercy to The Cat.

He first retraced the life of Mathilde Carré, her work for the Resistance and for the Vichy Deuxième Bureau. "If this woman committed treason," he said, "it was because she was one of the first to enter the Resistance and she was herself denounced. And how long did her period of treason last? Little more than a month and a half—just that brief moment of error—and after that she resumed her work on the side of the Allies."

Maitre Naud argued that many of the best members of the Resistance had at one time or another come to terms with the enemy. "She wanted to live; can she be reproached for that?" Moreover, argued Maitre Naud, The Cat had been just a bait in the hands of Bleicher, not herself an active agent. And she had escaped from him as soon as she was able.

"Remember," said Maitre Naud, "some of those with whom The Cat worked were strong enough to play a double game with the Germans. That was because they were professionals at this game of espionage. Mathilde Carré was only an amateur—and she showed the human weakness of an amateur in the tough game of espionage.

"Everyone secretly fears death. Mathilde Carré's weakness was that she preferred life to death when the Gestapo said to her: 'Do what we ask you, or this evening you will die.'

"Remember too that she was confined under horrible

conditions in La Santé prison just before she made her fatal decision."

Maitre Naud went on: "I plead guilty, to be sure, but I plead for mercy for this woman who believed herself to be stronger than she was and then found herself faced with this dilemma: to die or to live. After making her first mistake she was lost: she was compromised once and for all. Yet you should not forget that she was one of the first heroines from the beginning of the Resistance. Are you going to kill one of those who spread patriotic faith in the early days? You ought to make a difference between the French agents of the Gestapo who went and offered their services to the enemy and those who were first heroic but who over-estimated their own powers. I beg you now to spare the life of this woman who during years of heroism experienced only two months of weakness."

It was an effective plea, but the jury gave little sign of having been unduly moved by it. And now it was the moment for the judge to put to them the precise questions to which they had to give their answers. Slowly and with emphasis the judge read the first two questions concerning Mathilde Carré:

1st Question: Belard, Mathilde, widow Carré, here present and accused, is she guilty of having in Paris between 1941 and 1942, or in any case between June 16, 1940 and the Liberation, being a French citizen in time of war, maintained intelligence with a foreign power or with its agents with a view to aiding this foreign power against France?

2nd Question: Was the action specified above in Question Number 1 committed with the deliberate intention of favouring the enterprises of all kinds of Germany, a power which was the enemy of France, or of any one of the Allied nations at war against the Axis powers?

Questions of a similar kind were put to the jury about the other accused woman, Renée Borni. In neither case was there much room for doubt about the answer, which came as was expected. But by a majority the jury found that there were 'extenuating circumstances' in the case of Renée Borni, and recommended her for mercy.

But it may be noted in passing that in the case of both Mathilde Carré and of Renée Borni the verdict of guilty was recorded as being given only 'by a majority' of the jury, which means that there must have been at least one member of it who viewed The Cat's sentence of death with some misgiving.

But not so The Cat herself, as it appeared. For Mathilde Carré listened without the slightest sign of emotion as the judge read to the court the sentence of death. As one commentator put it, "She might have been listening to a sentence being passed on somebody quite different."

Solemnly the judge read the verdict: for The Cat, death and 'national indignity' and the confiscation of all her personal belongings, and four-fifths of the cost of the trial, which had lasted four days. For Renée Borni, two years and a half of imprisonment, 'national indignity' and a fine equivalent to £50. She would be free to return immediately to the clinic in which she was receiving treatment.

Mathilde Carré heard all of this impassively. Her hands resting on the ledge of the dock did not move nervously. There was still the trace of a smile on her lips. What was the secret behind the remarkable air of bravado which she had displayed all through the trial, of the appearance of diamond-hard cynicism which she had all along maintained? Was it all, as she was to suggest later in a letter which she wrote after the trial to Maitre Naud, just a mask to cloak her real emotions? Did she feel an inner remorse which she was too proud to reveal?

And did she believe that, in sentencing her to death,

the judge really meant what he said, that the sentence would indeed be carried out and that she would be shot one cold morning under the walls of a Paris fortress? Or could it be that, even then, she felt confident that either French clemency or the influence of her powerful friends of the Deuxième Bureau would enable her after all to escape her punishment? These were questions which were asked by those who watched her trial—but were never satisfactorily answered.

The Cat's death sentence aroused comparatively little interest in the outside world at the time. The verdict was not widely reported because at that moment the papers were filled with other matters which seemed to be of more pressing importance—the resignation of George Marshall as American Secretary of State, plans for the signature of the Atlantic Pact, Prince Aly Khan's quest across the world for the hand of Rita Hayworth. Hardly anybody even noticed when, a fortnight later, Mathilde Carré's appeal for a retrial was rejected.

Meanwhile from her condemned cell in the prison of Fresnes Mathilde Carré wrote in pencil on a rough piece of paper another letter to Maitre Naud who had put up such a spirited defence on her behalf. It was a letter which seemed to show that she still viewed her own past actions with something like equanimity—and still had hopes that, by argument—that specious argument for which she had always shown such a gift—something could be saved from the wreckage of her life.

The Cat's last letter ran:

DEAR MAITRE,

I should have liked to have said to you many other things but, alas, the presence of the guards prevented me. You should not give any credence to the evidence given by certain of the witnesses on the subject of my so-called depravity. My condemnation

to death has been decided. So I have no reason to keep anything secret. That is why I ask you to believe me.

I have not been guilty of everything of which I have been accused. To be sure, I have not always shown myself very amiable with regard to yourself, just precisely because I feel a great sympathy for you. I should not like to remain in your memory either as a monster or as a woman deprived of all feeling. If only you knew what it has cost me to put on this mask so as the better to hide my real nature! For years I have not had anybody to whom I could show myself as I really am. I have sunk into despair, believing myself incapable of supporting such a situation. But during the five days of the trial, and above all after the reading of the verdict, I have realised from where I draw this power and this mastery over myself which makes me able to smile silently even in my condemned cell.

I do not feel either hatred or anger against the Prosecutor, M. Becognée, although I have felt desperately little, abandoned and unhappy.

While you were making your speech for the defence I had to fight back my tears. I could not do more. I had had enough of everything. In short, I was at the end of my strength. How I would have liked to shake you by the hand to thank you for your admirable defence—even though the verdict had been pronounced in advance! I knew that you alone looked at me differently from the prosecution and the jury—and I can assure you that you were near the truth!

I think I still have the right to dispose of my life. I should so much like to be able to use the little which remains to me in doing good to other people and spreading some happiness around me. I believe in this even more intensively now that death is near.

There still remain so many things in my heart which I should like to be able to achieve. But how much time. . . .

This is why I beg you to do everything you can to try and get me out of this awful cell and this prison of Fresnes. . . .

I can find no more words. And anything more I might write to you would be only empty phrases. I wanted only that you should understand me and that you should realise what great hopes I place on you.

And with what affection I think of you,  
Your little,

And at the end of her letter, in place of a signature, Mathilde Carré had drawn a conventional childish cat, like this:



The indefatigable Maitre Naud lost no time in doing all he could to justify the 'great hopes' which Madame Carré had placed on him. First he received, and forwarded to the proper authorities, a strong plea for mercy for The Cat signed by two of the men who had known her best and suffered most from her actions. This was a remarkably generous action on the part of two of Mathilde Carré's main victims, and the authors of this plea have always subsequently requested that they should remain anonymous.

And finally Maitre Naud produced a closely-reasoned four-page memorandum in which he put forward to the French President himself, in detail, his reasons for asking that The Cat's life should be spared. The memorandum summarised briefly the valuable work which Madame

Carré had done for the Allies and the Deuxième Bureau in her early days, and maintained that, after her arrest, she had no choice but to act as she had done. The memorandum went on:

As was established at the trial, Bleicher and his agents found at the headquarters of the organisation at the time of the arrest of Armand and Violette many documents, including papers with the addresses of all the agents and a complete report on the activity of the Inter-Allied network, with the code-names of the agents and in some cases their names in clear as well.

For this reason, argued Maitre Naud, Bleicher would sooner or later have been able to round up the organisation even without the help of Madame Carré. In addition to the documents found at Armand's headquarters, Bleicher had also found the notebook in which Madame Carré had listed the series of appointments which she was due to have with the members of Inter-Allied, and he had also gleaned important information from the agents who were arrested before Madame Carré—Armand, Violette, Kiffer and Christian. And thus the role played in the arrests by The Cat was, he claimed, a purely passive one, and one which she was unable to avoid under penalty of death. To this contention Maitre Naud objectively commented: 'The passive role which she claims to have played is collaborated by some of the victims, contradicted by others. It is impossible to form a completely definite opinion about this point, but the prosecution appears not to have taken the element of doubt sufficiently into consideration.'

Passing to another subject which certainly counted considerably against Madame Carré at her trial, Maitre Naud wrote: 'Immediately after her arrest, Mathilde

Belard became the mistress of Bleicher. This unpleasant fact is in itself not incompatible with the intelligence activity of an agent of the importance of this woman who was, in fact, the second-in-command of Armand. The defence feels that the liaison between Mathilde Belard and Bleicher has been exploited by the prosecution as a heavy presumption of her guilt, so that her trial was carried out largely on psychological grounds.'

And Maitre Naud summarised his plea for mercy in these four points:

1. Mathilde Carré was an authentic, effective and enthusiastic member of the Resistance from September 1940 to November 1941.
2. The defence admits her error of two months during the time of her arrest.
3. Mathilde Carré revealed herself by confiding to an Allied agent the unfortunate undertaking she had been carrying on, either voluntarily or otherwise.
4. She risked her life both by making this confidence and by organising her departure for London in January and February 1942. If she had been discovered by Bleicher she would have been pitilessly executed.

Maitre Naud's efforts were successful. In May 1949 the death sentence on The Cat was commuted to one of life imprisonment and, despite many protests from Resistance circles, even this sentence was, some years later, still further commuted. And in the summer of 1954, after a total period of imprisonment of twelve years, Mathilde Carré went back to her parents' little home in the Avenue des Gobelins, a sick woman to be sure, and with her eyesight seriously affected, but, unlike many of the other former members of Inter-Allied, at least alive—and free.

## CHAPTER 19

### Cat without Claws

IT was some months after I heard of the final release of The Cat that I decided that, if I was to be able to write anything about her story in any detail, I must, at least once, meet her personally.

So one evening I went down to the Avenue des Gobelins and climbed the three storeys of the modest apartment house which is the home of Mathilde Carré's parents, M. and Madame Belard. The door was opened to me by Madame Belard, a heavily-built white-haired woman who regarded me with immediate suspicion, intensified vastly when I told her of my mission.

"My daughter is not here," she told me emphatically, "and I have certainly no intention of giving you her address. She is far from well and in no condition to receive anybody, least of all a journalist. Moreover we are extremely afraid to let anybody know where she is. Although she has no reason to have anything on her conscience, there are still many people who have feelings of revenge against her. If they knew where to find her, they might very well make an attempt on her life. All we ask now, Monsieur, is that we shall be left alone."

With some hesitation I persisted in my conversation with Madame Belard, which took place on the landing outside the little flat in which—so long ago as it now seemed—Sergeant Bleicher of the *Abwehr* had once made himself an uninvited guest.

As the talk went on, Madame Belard made it clear

that she harboured great feelings of resentment against Britain as a whole and British officials in particular. She told me: "Before the war there was nobody more friendly to the English than I was; after all, my husband fought alongside them in the first war. But how can I feel the same now, after what they did to my daughter?"

"What do you mean, exactly?" I asked.

"My daughter did inestimable service to the British, both at the time she worked with Armand and then again after she went to London," said Madame Belard. "Yet when the time came that she was in trouble there was not a single Englishman willing to raise a hand to help her. Surely just one member of the British Intelligence Service could have come to her trial and told the court the facts of what services she had really rendered them."

I said: "I'm not really the person to judge these things: but I'd certainly like to know what your daughter herself has to say about it."

"You won't hear a single word against Britain from my daughter," said Madame Belard. "Personally I find it more than I can understand. But there seems to be no bitterness in her at all after all that she has gone through."

I felt that I could not decently press matters further at that stage, so I left Madame Belard, saying only: "Anyway, please let your daughter know that I would like to see her, and ask her to think it over. I will come back in a couple of days and get her reply."

Two days later, after a telephone call with M. Belard, I was told that I had an appointment with Madame Carré in her parents' apartment for eleven o'clock the following morning.

It was with a feeling of considerable repressed excitement that I went down to the Avenue des Gobelins again that following day. For I had become fascinated by the story and by the enigma of the personality of Mathilde Carré. Here was a woman, now just over forty-five, who

had given herself freely to many men and whom many men had found irresistible. She had been accused of the most base duplicity, and yet she had, by all accounts, aroused admiration amounting almost to devotion from nearly all those men and women whom she had recruited to serve her. She had shown, really, not two but a score of different faces—affectionate and heartless, idealistic and cynical, generous and selfish, petty-minded and supremely intelligent, traitorous and loyal, cowardly and brave. What, I wondered, as I drove across the Seine and up the Boulevard St. Michel, was I going to find when I met this woman whom virtually nobody had seen since that day, six years previously, when she had not flinched as she was sentenced to death?

I certainly found none of the things I had expected.

The door of the apartment was opened to me by Madame Belard, who said only, "Yes, my daughter will see you now. Please come in." And I was shown into a typical little middle-class Parisian salon, with family mementoes standing on antique furniture and on the wall the famous picture of Mathilde Carré's brother in his imposing uniform.

I waited alone for a few moments before the door opened and The Cat came in.

She was small, smaller even than I had expected, and her eyes and expression were totally hidden behind an enormous pair of thick dark glasses. Her skin was pale and in her abundant locks of thick dark hair there were many strands now of white. She wore a plain pink blouse, very clean and neat, with a bright yellow woollen cardigan over it, and a slim black skirt. There was no varnish on her finger-nails and only a trace of make-up on her lips. Here was no *femme fatale*, nothing that fitted the conventional novelist's picture of an international spy. This quiet, modestly dressed woman looked like, perhaps, a good-class hospital nurse in civilian clothes, or

a governess on her day off. If this was The Cat, it was truly a Cat without claws.

She sat down beside me on the uncomfortable straight-backed Louis XIV sofa, folded her hands in her lap and said, "Well, Monsieur, what do you want with me? Don't you think I have suffered enough?"

"I wanted to ask you to tell me the truth about the part you played in all these things I have been hearing about you," I said.

"And all I am trying to do myself, Monsieur," she replied, "is to forget everything that has happened. If you are going to write anything at all about me, please ask the world to forget 'The Cat'."

"But at this stage," I persisted, even at the risk of exasperating her, "is there really nothing at all you want to say, for instance, about all those people who were arrested by the Germans?"

"Monsieur," she said again, with a remonstrating motion of her hand. "What could I do about that? I was offered the choice of going along or of being shot. What would you have done?"

I did not know the answer to that question for sure: so I asked her, "And what about those messages sent to London from St. Germain in your name? What about the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*?"

"What can I say about that? I had no means of knowing what messages Bleicher and Borchers were sending over the transmitter in my name. They could say anything they liked."

But according to all the testimony, even that of her own memoirs, The Cat had enthusiastically co-operated with the Germans during that period in The Cattery when the faked messages were being sent to London. Today, however, she would say nothing more on this subject. So I passed on to the matter of her journey with Lucas to London. "While you told Bleicher that you would go to

London as his agent, in reality you planned to work for the British all the time?" I asked this unobtrusive woman by my side.

"Yes, Monsieur, and that's exactly what I did do. The Germans really believed that I was going over to serve them, but all the time the British War Office knew everything about my plans, and it was they who arranged to get me across the Channel. Why, if they hadn't believed in me, do you think that Colonel Buckmaster himself would have come to meet me when I arrived in England?"\*

"What was the exact point from which you left France that night?" I asked her.

"Look," she said, "let me write it down for you."

She didn't remove her glasses, but she took a scrap of paper and with a pencil scrawled the words: "Rocher Mignon, Trebeurden, Brittany." And she said: "That is the place from which the British Navy took me across to England. When we got to the other side they motored me straight to London. I met a whole series of officers of the British War Office after that—and a lot of other British people besides. If you want to know, Monsieur, I even stayed for some time in the same flat as—", and she mentioned to me the name of a famous British novelist who had, I knew, served in a well-known regiment during the war as an Intelligence officer.

I talked to Madame Carré a little more about her time in London, about the flat she had occupied in Porchester Gate and another to which she said she had moved 'somewhere on the road leading out to Kew Gardens'. But I could see that she was still being very careful what she said.

Finally she summed it up. "I told the British everything I knew," she said, "and I am sure it was useful to them. I told them about the way in which Borchers and Bleicher

\* In fact, of course, it was Lucas whom Colonel Buckmaster went down to meet, since he did not know that The Cat was coming.

had used our radio and exactly how to do the same thing back to them. To begin with, at least, I feel sure that Bleicher really believed that I was in London as his agent, for the War Office kept up a flow of misleading telegrams to him in my name, using all the proper German code words and everything."

She added with a faint trace of a smile—how different a smile from that pert grin which the Paris Court had seen: "Bleicher I believe really had confidence in me—at least, more or less, because as you know, Monsieur, confidence is a very relative term, especially in matters like these."

"And about your arrest by the British?"

"I do not wish to make any complaints, or say anything at all more about it. But all the same the British did know that I had been of real use to them."

Mathilde Carré rose and held out her hand to me.

"There is really no more to be said, is there, Monsieur?" she said. "Everything that has happened is so much better forgotten. I never want to speak of it again."

Our talk had lasted little more than ten minutes. Then she showed me politely but firmly to the door.

"Goodbye, Monsieur," she said, quietly and gently, "And please forget that The Cat has ever existed."

That was the last, I think, that anyone outside her immediate family circle has ever seen of Mathilde Carré. Soon after that, the Belards told all enquirers that their daughter had moved out of Paris and was living quietly in the country under another name. No French newspaper has ever interviewed her and none of her former associates have seen her. Her present activities are shrouded in complete mystery, though they have been the subject of some strange rumours.

But even now, looking back on my own brief meeting with The Cat, I am struck by the totally unexpected character which she presented to me that morning. She

seemed so quiet, so modest, so meek, so dignified and so completely harmless that it was hardly possible to believe that this could conceivably have been the woman whose passionate drama I had been investigating. Was this how she really was? Or had the long years of imprisonment, ill-health and fading eyesight so greatly transformed her? Or—and the more I thought about it the more did this seem to me to be the answer—was it simply that Mathilde Carré was that morning, as she had done so often in her life before, simply adapting herself with consummate skill to a situation? Was she, in fact, just filling the role most calculated to disarm the inquisitive and persistent foreign newspaper man? Had The Cat adapted herself to impress me, with the same instinctive 'feel' for other people's personalities as she had employed in her encounters with all the varied types whose loyalty she had so completely won for her Resistance network—as she had obviously employed, too, in her perilous relationships with the Germans?

Only one thing was sure: whether it was through skill or sincerity The Cat that morning had put on a performance which had left me impressed.

## CHAPTER 20

# Riddle with Many Answers

AND now it seemed as though the quest for The Cat was nearly ended. But there remained to put on record the final fate of at least some of those whose lives she had so profoundly affected.

Her bitter rival Renée Borni, out of jealousy for whom many of The Cat's actions may have been committed, never served her full prison sentence of two and a half years. Grievously ill, she was released even from the clinic in which she was confined, and allowed to seek refuge and obscurity in an unnamed part of the French countryside.

And Armand who, in his way, had certainly loved both women and had paid dearly for that double love, was, after his arrest, to become the subject of yet another strange episode—and one which remains one of the unexplained mysteries of the espionage war. After that day of disaster to Inter-Allied, Armand was kept a prisoner for many months in Fresnes, subject to constant interrogation and a starvation diet. Stephane, the Pole who saw him once briefly in prison, told me that he had found Armand weak, exhausted—and despairing about the final outcome of the war. Yet his restless mind was still active, searching for any possible role which he himself might still be able to play. He had, it appears, many long talks with his interrogators and in some of them he outlined to the Germans some kind of proposition which would involve a journey by himself to Britain. And this, in fact, is just what did finally occur. Armand, just as The Cat had

done, made the improbable journey from a stinking cell in Fresnes to the comparative comfort of wartime London.

It was Bleicher himself who told something—but not all—of this story in the course of his interrogation carried out after the war and while he was a prisoner in the hands of the French authorities. Bleicher said that two months after the departure of *The Cat for Britain* his section of the Security Service at St. Germain had been dissolved and he himself had been absorbed by the main section of the *Abwehr*, installed in the Hotel Lutetia in Paris (the headquarters of Admiral Canaris), where one of his immediate superiors was an officer named Colonel Reile. And in June of 1942, Colonel Reile entrusted Bleicher with a strange mission with Roman Czarniawski who, suddenly in that month, was released by the Germans from Fresnes and found himself at liberty again in Paris. Armand told friends who saw him at this time that he had 'escaped' from the prison, but Bleicher's story to the French was that Armand was taken by him out of Fresnes and conducted to Lyons and Toulouse, where Armand sought contact with Polish underground organisations to arrange his transfer to Britain.

The journey of the former Polish prisoner and his German guardian seems to have been a highly agreeable affair. Bleicher took his mistress Suzanne Laurent along with them and, while Armand was allowed to spend a few days at Evian recuperating from the hardships of Fresnes, Bleicher and Suzanne made pleasure-trips to Aix-les-Bains and Chamonix. (At that moment it must indeed have seemed a not unpleasant war to those who were so far from the battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein!)

When all were rested, the trio proceeded to Toulouse, where Armand made contact with an underground organisation named 'Nestor' which undertook to smuggle him safely to Britain. The German and the Pole took

leave of each other in Toulouse, and Bleicher happily went on his way with the faithful Suzanne for an agreeable journey to Biarritz and Lourdes. Soon after, he recounted, he received a postcard from Armand announcing his safe arrival in Spain.

From Spain Armand apparently proceeded to London, but from that moment on I have not myself been able to find anybody able—or willing—to give me information on what he really did when he got there. But Armand in his early days was certainly a brave and attractive character, and it is a pity that his final fate should remain shrouded in mystery.

As for Hugo Bleicher himself, his war continued as it had begun, in the highly involved but comparatively comfortable field of intelligence work, overshadowed only by constant friction between his own service, the *Abwehr*, and their bitter rivals the Gestapo. Inside the Hotel Lutetia the flame of Nazidom burned only faintly and cries of 'Hell Hitler' were seldom heard. And the men of the *Abwehr*, from Admiral Canaris—who was to die for his conspiracy against Hitler—down to Bleicher himself, undoubtedly regarded the louts of the Gestapo, with their brutal beatings, tortures and murders, as uncouth fellows—and inefficient too. But their activities constantly overlapped, and Bleicher, who preferred ingenious intrigue to physical violence, found himself both watched and criticised by his more barbaric rivals.

Technically, Bleicher remained a sergeant throughout the war, much as he must have yearned for a commission as a reward for the important Intelligence tasks with which he was entrusted. It may well be that his virtual defeat over the episode of The Cat's escape to London counted against him in his efforts for promotion. But at least he remained throughout the war a sergeant with a very special position—an 'adviser' to his superior officers on the matters in which he was concerned, and

with virtually a free hand to conduct many operations as he himself thought best. And, even if he was tricked by The Cat and Lucas, he certainly did much invaluable work for the *Abwehr* in penetrating Resistance organisations with agents of his own, such as the renegade Raoul Kiffer whose arrest at Cherbourg had begun the downfall of Inter-Allied. For the remainder of the war, Kiki cheerfully worked as a 'double agent' for Bleicher and after the war faced a trial and sentence in Paris for what he had done. With the aid of a number of such men as Kiki, Bleicher, between 1942 and the time of the invasion, not only put his own agents into existing Resistance networks but actually, in Normandy, founded a mock 'Resistance' organisation of his own, operating a wireless set with London and seeking and receiving supplies of arms parachuted by the trusting British. But all this story is too long and too involved to be told here.

Details of some of Bleicher's other wartime activities have been given in a book which Borchers wrote about him (translated and edited in English by Ian Colvin) under the title of *Colonel Henri's Story*; for, though Bleicher never rose to commissioned rank, he gave himself the satisfaction of adopting the title of 'Colonel Henri' as a pseudonym for some of his secret operations.

The end of the war and the collapse of the *Wehrmacht* found Bleicher, still accompanied by Suzanne Laurent, fleeing from the advancing Allies and the increasing threat of the French underground forces, to Auxerre, Nancy, through Belgium and into Holland. There the British army finally caught up with him, and, for the second time in his life, at the age of 46, he became a British prisoner of war. After interrogating him at length at a prison camp in England, the British handed him over to the French. In October 1945 he told his story all over again to French Intelligence officials who, with characteristic Gallic consideration, allowed him to meet, in the

Ministry of the Interior in Paris, Suzanne Laurent, from whom he had been separated in Holland at the time of the German collapse. The reunion was only a temporary one, for Bleicher was ultimately sent back to Germany and Suzanne remained in France to face a trial, and a comparatively mild sentence, for collaboration. Today, I have been told, she is living under another name and occupies the post of manageress in a highly respectable provincial hotel in Northern France.

And Bleicher, the unabashed, who started life as a slick salesman and fought his war in civilian clothes, has gone back to business again. Today he keeps a small but flourishing tobacconist's shop in his little native town of Tettnang, in that attractive tourist country not far from Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance. But he is by no means above earning an honest penny from the memories of his *Abwehr* days. In 1955 he travelled to Paris in the company of a German journalist, Michael Soltikov, and with sublime self-assurance revisited many of those, including M. and Mme Belard, Maitre Brault and Madame Blavette, whom he had hunted down during the affair of The Cat—though the parents of Madame Carré resolutely refused to let him see once more The Cat herself. He had himself photographed on the terrace of the Café Pam Pam, scene of the first arrest which he had carried out in collaboration with Madame Carré. The results of this journey appeared subsequently in a highly romanticised book about The Cat which was published in Germany. And when I myself, while working on this book, wrote once to Bleicher asking him to clear up for me the exact location in St. Germain of The Cattery, he made it perfectly clear to me that his remaining interest in the whole affair was pecuniary rather than sentimental.

And now, finally, with regard to The Cat herself.

What will be the world's eventual verdict of her? Will it be that of the jury which sentenced her to death—or

that of the French officials who in the end showed her mercy?

That is likely to remain for ever a riddle without an answer; for men of many different stations in life and of many different nations seem to have found it singularly hard to make a firm judgment on Mathilde Carré. The Pole Armand obviously trusted her implicitly until he was betrayed. The Germans with whom she later worked did not disguise their crude admiration for their "*kleines Kätzchen*". The Frenchmen of the Vichy Deuxième Bureau could call her, even at her trial, an 'admirable woman'. Her defence counsel, Maitre Naud, was fervently loyal to her, as will be seen in the Epilogue to this book. And even the British Colonel Buckmaster, her main foreign adversary, could pay her a wry tribute when he said to me with cynical tolerance: "She had a lot of guts, that woman—a born adventuress."

And what about the verdict of her victims?

There were those who were outraged by what they felt to be the gross excess of tolerance shown to her when, after being sentenced to death, she was finally set completely free. Such feelings as these were expressed in a series of protests at her liberation which were registered by groups of former French Resistants in many parts of France. A typical protest resolution of this sort was passed in March 1955 by a meeting held in Orléans of the Loiret and Loir et Cher section of the National Federation of Former Members of the Resistance, which was attended by the brother of two of the victims of The Cat. The resolution declared that the meeting 'protests energetically at the final measure of grace accorded to Mathilde Carré, which is an offence against the memory of the victims of this woman, and asks the Minister of Justice to order a new examination of her case, and to communicate the result of this new examination to our Federation'.

But such protests as these had little practical effect, and

were not, apparently, universally supported. Indeed, even today The Cat would seem to continue to enjoy a remarkable degree of protection in certain high places in France.

In Britain she was judged severely. It was one of those who had been most closely associated with her during her period in London who described Mathilde Carré to me bluntly as, "vain, cruel, ruthless, sadistic and out for adventure—of every sort".

Yet, strangely enough, during my investigation of the affair I found that it was those who had known Mathilde Carré best and had suffered most from what she did who were often the least anxious to heap abuse on her.

There was the good-hearted Mireille Lejeune, for instance, whose policeman husband had died in Mathausen, yet who could still say sadly, "Micheline was a very great friend of mine and I would not like even now to speak of her in hatred. She was a mixture in her character. She could be so warm-hearted and generous: if somebody needed something she would give it to them at once."

There was the man who frankly described The Cat as 'a dangerous nymphomaniac'—but there was also the former woman friend who would say no more about The Cat's long series of personal affairs than to comment with quiet tolerance: "Yes, it's true she gave herself to men rather easily—but then you understand, Monsieur, she had a real need for that sort of physical satisfaction."

There was Maitre Brault, who had such a narrow escape from the clutches of The Cat, who said to me no more about her than, "I did think she was always awfully reckless: she scared me stiff."

There was Benny, who spoke to me forthrightly of her obvious egotism and added, "She was mentally brave—but not physically."

There was René Aubertin, who spoke in court in the name of all those who had suffered and died in Mathausen

but who prefaced his testimony with the condition: "I will not speak in hatred."

There were the witnesses of the period after The Cat had turned against Bleicher and threw in her lot again with the Allies, who commented, "While she worked for us at least she seemed to be loyal."

What motives can lie behind such judicial attitudes over so controversial a figure? Two things, I believe. One is no doubt the ability, amounting almost to genius, which Mathilde Carré had: to adapt herself to all manner of men in such a way as to win their loyalty and support.

But the other reason is, I think, due to a national characteristic which is particularly French; for that country which gave birth to the phrase '*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*' has always shown a great ability to understand and make allowances for human weaknesses and even human sins. The remarkable tolerance shown to The Cat in her own country where, through her, so many brave people suffered and died was summed up by René Auber-tin, who had lost everything and had so courageously built his life anew. It was a phrase thrown out incidentally in the course of a long conversation, but which I found both dignified and touching. "But you must remember that hatred is *not* a French sentiment."

## Epilogue

WHEN I had completed the manuscript of this book, I sent a copy of it to Maitre Albert Naud, who had defended The Cat at her trial and had, in the end, obtained her freedom for her. Although from a purely professional point of view Maitre Naud's 'dossier' on the affair of Mathilde Carré had long been closed, I knew, from the many talks I had had with him, that the fascination which the 'Affair of The Cat' held for him remained unabated. And so, in a final effort to obtain a balanced picture of The Cat, I wrote to Maitre Naud asking him to give me his own personal summing-up of the case. The long letter which he wrote me in reply is obviously not unbiased, but it attracted me by its compelling argument and by the revelation which it contained that even now, years after Mathilde Carré has disappeared from public view, many of those who knew her well are still under the sway of her strange personality. Certainly only a man with a gallant Resistance record of his own, such as Maitre Naud possesses, would even in these days venture to write so frankly of the highly specialised conditions in which, it is true, many of the trials of so-called traitors were conducted in the years immediately following the war.

Maitre Naud wrote to me as follows:

You have come to me at a decisive moment. I was wanting to talk to someone about that astonishing woman

and about her curious trial which started the flow of torrents of ink both too red and too acid to be the material of history. You arrived just at the right time.

So here are some recollections and my opinion:

The trial of The Cat was a false trial.

In the first place it was falsified by herself: she did not present herself to her judges as she really was. Instead of a real person it was 'a personage' who made her appearance in the court.

In the second place, this trial was falsified by the judges who had it under review. I except the President of the Court, Judge Drappier, who, by his impartiality and calm, won the esteem of all who had to do with Justice at that period. I except also the Government Prosecutor *Becognée* whose role was that of the accuser and who filled that role in good faith with the incomplete evidence at his disposal and with his biased eye as a member of the Resistance. I would speak rather of the members of the Jury, who could not be other than false judges since they belonged to that somewhat limited section of French people who fought against the Germans and paid for their courage with the loss of their liberty and their blood. Those men, set up as judges by a law of vengeance, twisted by their own sufferings, exalted by their very recent glory and often guided by their political opinions, would have had to have been supermen to have judged otherwise than with harshness and bias.

The fear of treason which for four years haunted them at every hour of their clandestine activity took on a face and a name in the person of every accused prisoner who appeared before them. Here it was no longer a question of a latent and anonymous menace lying in ambush for them on the corner of a dark street or in a house of whispers of the time of the occupation, but it was 'a traitor', something really concrete, which they now had before them in the dock and which was at the mercy of the photographers;

of the insults of the crowd and of the pitiless questions of the prosecution.

The jurors of that time felt, either obscurely or clearly, that they had received the mandate, formulated or not, from a community still in the process of binding its wounds and mourning its dead, to avenge the martyrs of the Resistance by sentencing to death those accused who had been delivered into their hands by examining magistrates who were often both hasty and summary.

There is not . . . or rather, there is no longer, any question that the very principle of the courts of justice of that period known as 'the liberation' was opposed to Justice pure and simple.

The trial of The Cat, therefore, could not be otherwise than falsified as were all the others, by the very essence of the jurisdiction involved.

It was falsified too—and this is the specific point to remember—by a preliminary inquiry which was full of gaps, and an actual trial at which only the victims, real, presumed or imaginary, were listened to with favour and credit. Hugo Bleicher, not found because he was not sought, and Czarniawski, absent because he was not summoned, were never heard at all.

International susceptibilities and alleged secrets of state prevented full light being thrown on the affair. This trial, which should have had a double aspect, British and French, and which was manifestly within the competence of a military court, was neither British nor French nor military—but simply impassioned and partisan.

I owe to two exceptional men, who were themselves real or apparent victims of The Cat, but who were able to rise above the popular clamour for death, M. Aubertin and M. Marchal, both heroes of the Resistance, the fact that I was able to save the life of my client. My efforts at the Bar, the conviction which animated me, the sentiment of justice which spurred me on, my record in the Resis-

tance which they knew, found in their hearts and their intelligence echoes which decided them to come to my aid after the verdict. They were able to lend their whole weight to that side of the scale in which I had already placed all that which should be counted to the credit of Mathilde Carré, exceptional agent in the service of the Allies. The penalty of death was, thanks to our joint efforts, commuted to that of hard labour for life.

History, which no doubt will never preoccupy itself with the truth of this affair, unique though it is, has not yet recorded (will it some day do so?) whether this commutation of the sentence justly corrected the injustice of the verdict. For my own part I do not think it did.

But, as I said at the beginning of my reply, the trial was, if possible, falsified even more by The Cat herself.

In the first place by that disturbing pseudonym, so redolent of the romantic novels of 'green-eyed spies': The Cat. I know that this is what she was called and was what she called herself, my unfortunate client, but how much harm was done to her at the period of her trial by the abusive and often improper use of that nickname by a press avid for sensations! And ill-fortune had it that The Cat had a face which corresponded with her legend. Around this immobile face with the enigmatic eyes, a sombre and sanguinary imagery, such as the public loves, was created and seems to have obsessed the judges to the point of irritation.

And then, and above all, there were those famous 'Memoirs' which The Cat wrote in her English prison. Intended to be published and to provoke a scandal, this manuscript, which was confiscated at the moment of her imprisonment in France, resulted in making of Mathilde Carré a stereotyped character from which she was never able to separate herself. She ended up by adopting this pose of icy and apparently inhumane indifference as a sort of armour against unjust attacks and against the

implacable development of her trial which led to her condemnation to death. An antipathy of which she herself was the architect spread each day more and more over the jury and the public in court, and on the following day—how greatly reinforced!—found its echo in the press.

At no moment did the real Mathilde Carré appear in court

She it was whom I saw alone in her cell. But I was not able to take her out of it. When she left her prison, she came out enveloped in her defensive personality. She accepted a tacit convention imposed by public opinion. She submitted to examination and questions as the personage she had created—but not as the person whom I had discovered and liked in the solitude of her cell, that is to say, as she herself wrote to me in her farewell letter: 'little (in the sense of weak and fragile), abandoned and unhappy'.

In all the mass of what has been written about The Cat I have read much distressing nonsense. She has been made, in a manner both fantastic and contradictory, a person who was at one and the same time Machiavellian, lucid as the devil, and a lover with a brain obscured by passion, whose patriotism wavered or was exalted according to the nationality—enemy or ally—of the partner she was with at the time. This picture is as false as her trial was.

Today Mathilde Carré is free. It seems that a certain degree of justice has been rendered to her. I did what I could for that.

They say that she is now half blind and fiercely solitary. During the months that I was acting for her I had with her an intimate contact which prevents me now from viewing without emotion the withdrawal of this woman who seeks to separate herself from a world in which she lived too dangerously to hope for the forgiveness of men. I have not seen her for seven years; perhaps I shall never see her again. I am, in spite of my devotion, indissolubly mingled with her unhappy memories.

Such was the view of The Cat's most able defender.

There remains one final voice to be heard, that of another man who knew Mathilde Carré well but, having done so, takes a view notably less lenient than that of Maitre Naud. To balance the able and persuasive plea of The Cat's own counsel, I thought it would be fair to seek the view of Pierre de Vomecourt, who shared with her such a dramatic portion of her adventures.

This is what Lucas wrote to me:

I greatly appreciate your asking me to give my views on the story of The Cat as you have told it. I do so all the more willingly as it had been a source of amazement for me to see the importance given to Mathilde Carré, without the real story ever having been told—until you decided to do so.

All that had been written up to now was the result of unbridled imagination of authors let loose on part of the memoirs of a woman who wished to be thought the greatest spy of the war, or on publications of Germans who did not want to publicise the fact that after the great success of infiltrating a British organisation they themselves had been tricked and counter-infiltrated.

I therefore wish to congratulate you most heartily on a tale which presents different views with complete impartiality after having, in every case, gone back to sources. Your painstaking efforts have succeeded in presenting a story which is historically true.

Your sense of fairness induced you to ask Maitre Naud for an opinion and you have offered me the possibility of replying.

Maitre Naud, in his letter, states his case, as he did before the Court, with his usual great talent, but I cannot agree with him: like many other men and women, Mathilde Carré had rendered valuable services to the Allied cause before her arrest. Like a few others she had

flinched when arrested and accepted to work for the Germans. She distinguished herself from them by the whole-hearted way she sent her former comrades to death. Witness after witness proved that she had not made the slightest attempt to limit the damage caused by her betrayal. On the contrary, she helped the Germans with the same zest as she had previously displayed when working for the Allies, or when later she was to do so again.

The only explanation I can find of her successive sincerities lies in the fact that her mainspring was colossal self-centredness, in other words 'inordinate, criminal and suicidal pride'.

Maitre Naud tells us that the Mathilde Carré of the trial was not the true one; that she hid the 'weak and fragile' woman under the conventional picture which her own memoirs had depicted. And yet, could she have been *really* 'weak and fragile' when she listened, dry eyed, to the harrowing tales of those lucky enough to have come back from the German hell camps? At no time did she show any sign of regret, and she appeared to ignore the very existence of the gentle rain that drops from heaven upon the place beneath: Mercy.

In the five strenuous weeks that preceded my return to England, I did not have much leisure to reflect on Mathilde Carré's mental make up. The only important thing for me was to make sure that she should do as she was told; the fundamental causes of her reactions were of no interest at the time. But when I told her how we could hoodwink the Germans and counter-infiltrate them, I felt at once that it was the kind of game she understood and loved to play. And well she played it. As I knew her then, she was clever, ruthless and totally self-centred. This made it easy to make her believe she was pulling the strings.

Another aspect of her character was brought to light by the trial: her complete callousness. Lives were but

expendable material in the great game, and the suffering of human beings—herself excepted—was of no account.

I cannot finish this letter without referring to Maitre Naud's statements in your book:

'If this woman committed treason it was because she was one of the first to enter the Resistance and she was herself denounced.'

This is certainly not an excuse. Only a handful of the first men and women who began the Resistance in France escaped arrest. In practically all cases they were denounced. Had they all committed treason when in the hands of the Gestapo, there would no longer have been a Resistance.

'Remember some of those with whom The Cat worked were strong enough to play a double game with the Germans. That was because they were professionals at this game of espionage. Mathilde Carré was only an amateur—and she showed the human weakness of an amateur in the tough game of espionage.'

Maitre Naud knew, of course, that in fact very, very few of these men were professionals: neither I, nor any of my friends and agents. The Resistance was built up by the attempts, errors and sacrifices of amateurs, men of peace but men for whom freedom was an ideal which meant more than life; this is what gave the Resistance the unquenchable spirit and selflessness which was lacking in those who betrayed.

\*

\*

\*

These, then, are the highly divergent views of two highly intelligent men. Perhaps they will help the reader to form his own answer to the riddle of Mathilde Carré.









UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



120 191

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY